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**DEPARTMENT OF
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY
CALCUTTA**

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Comparative Literature
and
Literary Studies
Today

Founded by
Buddhadeva Bose

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JJCL 50

our contributors

This special 50th issue of the *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* focuses on “Comparative Literature and Literary Studies Today.” Coming after Rabindranath Tagore’s 150th birth anniversary, it was also planned, after Tagore’s talk “Visvasahitya”, delivered in Kolkata at the Jatiya Shiksha Parishad in 1907, as a reconsideration of the value of the arts and humanities in ever renewed engagements with the “other”. We are honoured to publish the articles by Kumkum Sangari and Ganesh Devy, both invited contributions, and happy to include a refereed selection from the other submissions received for this issue.

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Kumkum Sangari

AESTHETICS OF CIRCULATION: THINKING BETWEEN REGIONS

Thinking of regional literatures within a nation in a comparativist frame can be problematic because regions are volatile. What constitutes a region? Languages can spread and cluster beyond territory, a linguistic zone may shrink or exceed its given boundary, territorial borders fluctuate, contract, expand or vanish; regional narratives travel as units, tropes, styles, themes or genres. Regions can be reconstellated on many axes - linguistic, religious, political - and host or expel interstitial, migrant or marginalized groups. Most regions are multilingual - monolingual fantasies are usually hegemonic aspirations.¹ Indeed these are also crucial questions in any history of the modern. The complexity of linguistic, spatial and temporal provenance raises difficulties in circumscribing the objects of comparison.

I propose a *critical* aesthetic of circulation that understands *co-constitution* and can step out of usual questions of influence, comparability, commensurability, and set aside hierarchies based on centres/peripheries or the metropolitan/global market presence of art and literature. Co-constitution may be economic, social, patriarchal, ideological, cultural, linguistic, political (as in anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles), and anchored in subtle and complex histories of translation, circulation and extraction that span these fields. An analysis of co-constitution discloses visible or subcutaneous connections between seemingly discrete, disparate or binarized entities: for instance, owner-slave, white-black, Hindu-Muslim, colonizer-colonized, metropole-periphery, east-west, indigenism-

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orientalism, tradition-modernity, waged work-unpaid labour, north-south. The significance of co-constitution is this: radical alterity is easier to recuperate and demonize from imperial, orientalist, regionalist, sectarian and communal positions. A history of *implication* that shapes material lives, sexuality, labour, consumption, cultural production - in reciprocal or antagonist, distant or intimate connections - cannot serve these ends. Several stories of colonial co-constitution that imbricated the fantasia and materiality of Europe in its others have been assembled by locating interfaces, intersections, links, ties, interdependence, relationality, cultural mixing, interaction, imperial encounters, contact zones, transculturation, hybridity, resistance, as well as within Marxist theories of mediation, uneven and combined development, dependency and world system, slavery and colonization, and these have challenged dichotomous internalist and externalist accounts of cultural production. Yet the depth and significance of wider *multidirectional* co-constitution as histories, practices, spaces and material places of implication still needs to be elicited. A historical materialist and political theory of sporadic, unequal, yet mutually formative co-constitution which includes discursive, oral, performative, literary and visual systems - precapitalist, colonial, contemporary - may transform the object of enquiry and surmount rigidities of region.

An aesthetic of circulation would follow changing geopolitical maps or work with differing temporal geographical clusters depending on state forms, political economy, cultural production, avoid the hierarchies implicit in the global/local or in unidirectional travel, and see no place as too small for attention. But methodological regionalism is not a solution - witness how new regions are manifested when new historical, cultural or economic questions are asked;² how old regional constellations lose their energy or synergy, or are reconstellated by the nation form and the political economy, or melted/reconstituted in transnational mass culture, or dematerialized in cyberspace.

I argue that the continuous production of crossregional constellations - formal, generic, linguistic, semantic - through older

aesthetics of circulation not only puncture Hindu/Indian chauvinisms and Eurocentrism, make the question of who ‘arrived’ first irrelevant, but can provisionally point to an aesthetic and yield a critical analytic that answers to a contemporary understanding of national and world history *as* a history of multidirectional co-constitutions, and a comparative method unconstrained by, yet attentive to, borders. The faded maps of prenatal and precapitalist Perso-Turkish, Mongol, Arab, Chinese, Mughal cosmopolitanisms - embedded in an Eurasian aesthetic of circulation - are largely undervalued as lineages of the modern - yet they point to the potential force of earlier multidirectional histories of implication, palimpsestic memory structures and multilinear passages to the modern. To this end I assemble a story of Mughal art that rolls a precapitalist cosmopolitanism into the early modern, unfurls at the edges of capitalism and streams into the present, the transformations along the way range from the transregional to the transnational, from patronage to commodity forms.

I draw here on an argument first developed in relation to art history,³ because similar questions can be raised about the reconstellation of narrative and discursive fields. My intent is not to superimpose the art historical on the literary, which have overlapping yet distinct logics, rather to defamiliarize literary dispositions that isolate literature as an object of enquiry, and question the artificial separation of visual, narrative and discursive forms that have often relied on, assumed or animated each other.

Precapitalist cosmopolitanisms

The aesthetics of circulation crafted in precapitalist, prenatal and often transcontinental cosmopolitanisms calls attention to dialectical processes of diffraction and sedimentation, diffusion and consolidation. The early cosmopolitanism of the Silk Road in which persons, goods, ideas, beliefs, images and narratives went to and fro for centuries is well known. After Arab conquests of China, the Silk Road and other Asian caravan trade routes became a site of interanimation of Buddhism and Islam, Byzantine and Chinese aesthetics/motifs that

unsettle any easy separation of the Islamic from the narrowly Indic or the wider Asian and Eurasian. PreRenaissance ‘Islam’, stretching from southern Spain through Central Asia to the Far East, also carried Indian and Chinese goods and ‘culture’ to Mediterranean Europe.⁴

The elitism of the Silk Road was softened only by millennial duration and slow transaction, or what may be termed the transient intimacy of distance. This cosmopolitanism was an accumulation of irregular transitions over a *longue duree* that prefaced the more intense interactions and processes of syncretization from the 13th to the 18th century. The webbed histories of circulating narratives, art practices or religions are imbricated in other regions through the expansion and contraction of empires, travel, settlement, and contiguous trading diasporas, and always *in* formation: what travels back and forth in *one* configuration and conjuncture, goes elsewhere or returns in changed form in others, piling layer on unsettled layer, and defies sharp or tidy periodization. These early recursivities, that composed a space of continuous reinscription and re-formation (rather than unidirectional diffusion), comprised a transAsian history of *reuse* of text and image in murals and folios, generated reserves, latencies, and structures of memory from prenatal configurations with shifting political borders in which West, South and Central Asia were relatively diffuse zones of interchange.

The Silk Road, the Indian Ocean network, and other Eurasian precapitalist mercantile exchanges of knowledges, technologies et al impelled translation - translation was a sign of extended circulation - and were, as Jack Goody notes, implicated in a process of “segmented secularization” partly generated by contact between religions.⁵ This became the ground from which the resources of an European early modern (I use the term as a synonym for the Renaissance, secularization, intensified circulation of goods and ideas as well as ‘contact’ between peoples) - were assembled. It is well established that the European Renaissance and its secular elements were predicated on Greek and Arab or Islamic precursors,⁶ though these interrelated histories and lineages were disavowed by insular

narratives of an Italo-centric Renaissance or enfolded and systematized as 'European' knowledge as early mercantilism was slowly subsumed by the logic of capital. The secular did not constitute a final break with restriction but was an expanding and contracting *element* in both Eurasia and Renaissance Europe.⁷

Mughal art: conjunction and circulation

Mughal art, particularly folio painting, stood at the edges of capital and was to belong to the realms of commission, patronage, gift, colonial booty *and* commodity. Significantly, like Persianate folios, painted images illuminated poetry, 'translated' prose narrative, carried literary allusions or associations and could be accompanied by text or inscriptions. The Persian painter Kamaluddin Bihzad of Herat, venerated by the Mughals and often copied by their court artists, was 'inspired' by many texts and may be unintelligible without them - he illuminated the poetry of Nizami of Ganjeh and Amir Khusrau of Delhi. The embedded text and inserted verses within his figurative painting indicated lines of allegorical reading.⁸

More significantly, Mughal art made no originary claim. Rather, it was a unique conjunction of West/Central Asian courtly folio painting - that carried the Hellenistic legacy of Islam (as in Nizami's *Khamsa*) and by the 14/15th century had blended Arab, Persian, Turkish, Mongol and Chinese elements through a process of "repetition and refinement, modification and embellishment"⁹ - with both the Indic and late Renaissance European.¹⁰ In Mughal courts, artists came from diverse regional schools and often painted across religious boundaries; painters and painting *conventions* from extant provincial schools in South and Central Asia could come together on the *same* page, especially in the *Hamzanama* (that mingles Chinese, Persian, Bihzadian and Hindustani elements).¹¹ Royal collections too juxtaposed Chinese, West Asian, Central Asian and European styles.¹²

European works and prints brought by Jesuits or merchants percolated into paintings in Akbar's court that picked up techniques of perspective, naturalism, foreshortening, spatial recession and

shading, allegorical figures and secular subjects, features from landscape painting (distant landscapes or narrative scenes) and biblical illustrations (European-style angels, winged putti and angel heads), placed elements from other locales (such as a Dutch church tower) in new conjunctions, and often rearranged or reinterpreted Christian themes (especially images of Noah's Ark, Jesus, Virgin Mary, and Nativity scenes).¹³ In *The Holy Family* (Mughal c.1650) Mary, localized by a Mughal crown, jewellery, clothes and bindi, sits on a Kashmiri carpet with a mango tree in the background. Kesu Das, probably a brahmin, painted *St Matthew the Evangelist* (Mughal, 1588); taken from a Flemish engraving by Philip Galle, it conjoins a lotus lake and forest with a distant European townscape and adds an ewer bearing his own name in the foreground.¹⁴ *The Virgin and Child with an Angel* by Muhabbat and Tara (Mughal c. 1595-1600) places a book of verse by the 14th-century Persian poet Hafiz next to the baby Jesus. (More than two centuries later, in 1827, Goethe's impulse to embrace non-European literatures to inspire new forms of creativity and interaction in a 'world literature' (*Weltliteratur*) was partly propelled by reading a German translation of the poetry of Hafiz.¹⁵) *St Jerome* painted by Farrukh Beg for Jahangir (c. 1610) modeled on Marten de Vos's copy of Durer's woodcut, substitutes some of the Christian iconography, uncloses the contemplative scholar-saint by seating him under a billowing, enfolding Persianate tree (though still facing his desk), and configures him as akin to an inward-gazing sufi adept. A Mughal rendition of Bihzad's prince and hermit theme (illustrated for the *Diwan* of 15th-century Persian poems by Shahi of Herat, attributed to Miskin, c. 1595), adds a castled European-type city/world sheltering a temple painted with European Renaissance atmospheric perspective, while the city dwellers - Portuguese dressed in European fashion - double as demon robbers.¹⁶ *Krishna's Combat with Indra*, an illustration for the *Harivamsa* (c. 1590), is a curious conjunction of vaishnav myth (Krishna on Garuda subduing Indra on his elephant Airavata in the sky) with vignettes from European sources - a ship sailing past a rocky landscape, faces of celestial beings peeping out

from blue clouds - inset in a wide floral border. In Bichitr's *Jahangir Prefers a Sufi to Kings* (c. 1615-18), Jahangir sits on an inelegantly high throne inspired by a European hourglass; winged cherubs turn away in awe or despair as Jahangir spurns worldly monarchs - the Ottoman sultan (based on a European print) and King James I (copied from a miniature by the English painter John de Critz) - for the company of Hasan Chishti, a sufi mystic.¹⁷ The orb or 'globe paintings' presented the Mughal emperors magisterially, but awkwardly, as inhabiting and controlling the 'world'.¹⁸

The significant art fact is not merely that European pictures were copied along with the Persianate, subjected to selection based on connoisseurship or personal preference, Mughalized and resignified, but that Europeans too were familiar with Mughal painting from the 17th century. Rembrandt, for example, possessed a collection and made 21 copies of miniatures, some of which were sold in an auction in 1656; and Rembrandt and Willem Schellinks copied Mughal versions of the apotheosis of Akbar and Jahangir that had *already* adapted European Christian iconography.¹⁹

Mughal art was conversant with early Eurasian cosmopolitanism and a still coeval, but peripheral, European early modern. It was a *node* of conjunction and a *vector* of circulation between Europe, West, Central and South Asia, as well as embedded modalities of circulation of image/text *in* form, genre and subject matter. Retrospectively, Mughal art can be read as a *situated* aesthetic of circulation (distinct from postmodern flux or radical instability), and as pointed, self conscious conjunction that was in turn amenable to continuous resignification by regional schools. It can offer a critical position from which to consider the epistemic shift in which copying, assimilation and innovation slipped out of aesthetics of circulation and were locked into the colonial dyptych of derivation and appropriation.

These older histories put a question mark on modernist topoi of supersession of the old, compulsive novelty, romantic/modernist masculinist fictions of the individual as creator as well as the modern conceived teleologically as agent of destruction or salvage of

tradition/archive. For the Mughals, borrowing knowledge from "other countries" could be cast in a language of insight because knowledge encompassed the unfamiliar and was predicated on gathering sedimented "wisdom" in slow time.²⁰ In this episteme, imitation marked apprenticeship, respect, acclaim, elective or formal affiliation, an absorption and transmission of value. It displayed rather than submerged its sources. Yet as K.G. Subramanyan notes, novel images *were* produced through a series of adjustments, adaptations, deletions and reinterpretations in Mughal, as in Gandhara, art.²¹ Such an aesthetic of circulation relegates concepts of purity and demands for authenticity - whether non-European or European - since copying could be in the name of reverent transmission or in the name of originality: *both* were dependent on others, though the one overemphasized it and the other disavowed it when the originality claim became an assertion of colonial power. Both carried authorial signatures but differed in the valorization of singularity.

On multidirectional diffusion and bifurcated trajectories

The recursivities and topologies of circulation were often noticed but subsumed in other agendas. Non Eurocentric concepts of Asian art began to appear in the 20th century, yet the multidirectional diffusion that fed the European early modern and the West/Central Asian passages to the modern in Europe and South Asia - with their continuously mediated forms of cosmopolitanism, lurking individuation and religious pluralism - remained shadowy and did not overhaul the relational geography of modernity. A bifurcation of streams had occurred in precolonial circulations: West/Central Asian art drew on the Greek, Buddhist, Christian and Byzantine, spread them in South Asia, came to stand in conjunction with the European early modern, and later entered Mughal and Deccani art as well as European modernisms.²² Indian and Persian manuscript illuminations were collected in late 19th/early 20th century Europe (often pillaged from royal collections in Persia/Iran and sold to Parisian collectors) and exhibited several times in Paris and Munich, sometimes with the *conscious* intent of shaping a modernist avant

garde.²³ One goal of the 1910 exhibition of “Masterpieces of Muhammedan Art” in Munich was that “colour harmony and ornamental grandeur may well serve as inspiration and *open up new directions for modern art*.”²⁴ According to an organizer of this exhibition, “In the harmony of their colours, in the grandeur of their ornament, the creations of Muhammadan art...are suited above all *to provide stimuli to the modern artist* and perhaps reveal new approaches to him.”²⁵ The exhibition displayed 180 Persian, 119 Indian, 47 Turkish and 40 Arab paintings, miniatures and calligraphy (excluding book bindings),²⁶ and was crucial in shaping the work of Matisse, Paul Klee and Kandinsky. Kandinsky and Matisse were interested in the formal principles and aesthetic qualities of carpets and Persian miniatures and looking for visual means of transgression of European categories of art.²⁷ These paintings were quickly abstracted, severed from anchoring or attached narrative, poetry and discourse, their use of colour picked up, and reveal how, along with Japanese, Russian, West African, Mexican and Oceanic artefacts, they ‘catalysed’ European modernisms (Primitivism, Impressionism, Fauvism, Postimpressionism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Cubism).²⁸

Amrita Sher-Gil’s often quoted rapturous remark about “those Basohli things” which were “as well painted as Matisse” and “reminiscent of Gauguin,”²⁹ can be read within a Eurocentric art history though her practice was more layered. If the prism was one of circulation rather than western, eastern or universal monoliths, Matisse could be reminiscent of Persian miniatures,³⁰ some of their elements tracked through the Mughal to mid-18th-century Basohli, and Gauguin’s male gaze read as dependant on a thickly gendered ‘primitive’.

Till at least the 1950s, the ideological force of colonialism, intensified by collaborationist currents, lay precisely in this: that it could block positions in which the claim to interaction with European art could be made from older coeval histories of albeit elite cosmopolitanisms in which Europe was one among others, rather than from colonial abjection, modernist universalism, or a self-generated ‘west’.³¹ It could prise the subcontinent apart from a

millennial history of continuous circulation and co-constitution, institute binaries of east-west, Indic-Islamic, indigenous-alien, derivation-innovation, ownership-borrowing, and propel an expenditure of energy on self-definition. Even now, sorting out continuities, transitions and ruptures runs the triple risk of a civilizational indigenism, an adaptive functionalism and an overprivileging of colonialism.

Notions of the modern in India crafted in the miasma of colonial cognitive grids and Eurocentric histories squashed the wide Asian, southern European and north African circuits of exchange that predated the European Renaissance but also fed it; nationalism with ‘Hindu’ pretensions went back to an ancient Indian past and rejected alien conquest,³² while the secular national acknowledged these circuits, but more as a lever against communalism than as an affirmation of other lineages or passages to a secular modern.³³

Mughal art: co-constitution and resignification

Related yet bifurcating trajectories, co-constitutive histories of mutual shaping or implication can be indirect, jagged, angular, power-laden, paradoxical, antagonist, and could in fact be pegged on several historical ensembles and material processes, coeval developments, simultaneous eruptions,³⁴ sequential relays, ideological configurations, production-and-reception circuits and political economies to elicit the simultaneous production of modern visibility in sharply *different* registers. The story of Mughal art spans the decline and rise of empires as well as the emergence of new political regions; it begins in the coeval spaces of capital, curves into colonization and later the nation-form, and can be grasped through analytic strategies of denaturalized sequences, contemporaneous counterpoints, radical juxtapositions and contrapuntal resistances.³⁵

Co-constitutive historical sequences could unfold in paradoxical relays. As naturalism and perspective came to dot 17th-century Mughal painting: the medieval monsters and Renaissance grotesques in European art gave way with colonial expansion to voluptuous

orientalisms (culminating in Jean Ingres, Jean-Leon Gerome, Henri Regnault) that defined the self-image and meaning of Europe.

Alterities could erupt simultaneously and find dissonant resolutions. In distant yet not isolated Rajasthan, an artist probably trained in Turkman styles in Golconda enacted a euro-chinoiserie in *Lovely Chinese Ladies* (Mewar, 1700) in which precolonial domestication exceeds conventional visual hierarchies of size, and turns into an accidental allegory of untranslated alterity. Two gigantic Chinese women (servants?) and a huge table (superimposed with tracings from Tabriz) stand athwart a European scene (architecture and figures taken from European engravings) secreting a Chinese dragon, a kissing European couple, a munching goat and a cat - and lilliputianize the strolling European men and women. A few years later, in 1719, Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, a would-be slave trader, and a figure for the seduction and domestication of alterity, colonized his tropical island sporting a gun, a "great clumsy goatskin umbrella" and a "large pair of Mahometan whiskers" as his fair skin turned "Mulatto."³⁶

Aesthetics of circulation persisted, even proliferated, alongside the decline of the Mughal empire. The peak and decline of Mughal ateliers dovetailed with the crystallization of Rajasthani, Pahari and other regional schools often by migrant Mughal court painters³⁷: 18th-century Kishangarh and Kangra-style painting in Rajput courts fused Mughal elements (that had already conversed with the Ramayana and Mahabharat) with sensuous and lissom bodies, vaishnav or puranic stories, romantic and courtly themes (for instance, *Taking of the Toll: Radha Intercepts Krishna* c. 1750-75, ascribed to Mahesh of Chamba, Mughalizes women's faces and the clothes of Krishna and Radha). As late Mughal painting straggled into the colonial 1830s/40s and became stiff and nostalgic, it was hybridized by shifts in patronage - some (often anonymous) court painters became bazaar or Company School painters, adapted to the naturalist tastes of East India Company British patrons, mixed elements of provincial miniature styles eclectically with folk patas and English/amateur water colours³⁸; European subjects, hitherto

novel curiosities and emissaries or small notations of strange firangi traders/spectators contained in the far distance or the edges of Mughal paintings³⁹ became fleshly, regally dressed Europeans in late Mughal/colonial darbar scenes⁴⁰; some Muslim painters rendered mythological themes in miniature style and format for Hindu patrons.

The emergence of museological decontextualization, ethnographic desires and bazaar aesthetics from the mid-19th century, and their subsequent entanglement with commercial orientalism, retrospectively create an ensemble in which markets function as a vector of expanded circulation and colonial co-constitution. As Mughal art crossed from sumptuary to popular commodity and bazaar aesthetics in colonial India, it was successively and simultaneously mined along with the Persian in interlocking Euroamerican 'contact' zones - the ethnographic yet decontexting exhibitionary complex of world fairs, expositions, museums. Mughal themes and court scenes were replicated and mounted on furniture, frames, jewellery et al⁴¹ from the mid-19th century in Delhi. West, Central and South Asian artefacts entered an expanding elite market in Euroamerica as the sign of an exotic imaginary that spilled out of the circumference of an older European aristocratic luxury market that had traversed *chinoiseries*, *turqueries* and *moghuleries*. In the mid-18th century, a room in Empress Maria Theresa's castle near Vienna was decorated exclusively with Indian miniatures from the 16th and 17th centuries which had been bought for her in Turkey.⁴² Now commercial orientalism permeated private costume balls, fetes, theatre, opera, silent cinema, department stores, trade signs and figures, calendars, posters, furnishings, advertisements, fashion - Persian designs on evening bags and gowns, scenes from Persian miniatures enameled on vanity cases, 'eastern'-style sets, costumes and dresses, culottes patterned on Turkish harem pants. Department stores - emblems of modernity and sites of hardening scopic regimes - featured oriental extravaganzas, Cairo markets, Turkish harems, Hindu temples, in a 'market cosmopolitanism' inevitably striated by empire.⁴³ Indeed museum, fair, exhibition, shopping arcade, department store and silent cinema were often formally interrelated in styles of display, decor and address, and

could blur the specific provenance of West, Central and South Asian artefacts. Commercial orientalism became an *apparatus* of modernity in early 20th-century London, Paris, New York, that fashioned a presiding masculinity and femininity, and partly designed the insignia and image of an emancipated New Woman.⁴⁴ The Parisian fashion designer, Paul Poiret, gave a Thousand and Second Night party to celebrate his new 'Oriental' look in 1911: he dressed as a sultan holding an ivory-handled whip and scimitar, guests were greeted by "ebony-black" slaves, his wife and her women "attendants" were confined in a golden cage, and "in a pantomime of slavery and liberation," released when all the guests were assembled.⁴⁵ The scenography of the fete - replete with awning, salons strewn with coloured cushions, gardens spread with Persian rugs - drew from the 'Eastern' miniatures Poiret had seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum while the booths patterned on souks with craftsmen at work, acrobats, 'Eastern' musicians and fireworks reprised typified features of the Euroamerican exhibitionary complex. The script writer for Cecil DeMille's films on modern marriage, Jeanie Macpherson, was asked to "write something typically American that would portray a girl in the sort of role that the feminists in the country are now interested in...the kind of girl that dominates."⁴⁶ In DeMille's *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919) the wealthy Leila Porter, dressed in ornate orientalist fashions, surrounded by Art Deco and Asian artefacts, has a spectacular fantasy of "Wealth" in which she plays an oriental queen in an opulent quasi-Babylonian court serviced by coloured male slaves who bring her caskets, precious stones and silks. This fantasy, which prefaces her rejection of "gray matrimony" and divorce, is an ambiguous sign of a new white femininity/imperial power, sexual license/consumption, of displaying *and* releasing American mobility. Given the generalized and regionally blurred orientalia that serves as visual culture and prop for Euroamerican modernity, one may ask what did commercial, exhibitionary and cinematic orientalism destabilize *and* affirm? How did dreams of mobility that refused to lose their place or privilege, turn the orient as zone of erotic transfiguration into a modality of *becoming modern*

in Euroamerica, a constitutive imaginary that made both selves and others? If British Orientalism in India was a site for constituting a collaborative and divisible authority that offered middle class and upper caste Hindus a relationship with a generalized 'west',⁴⁷ commercial orientalism in Euroamerica offered to extract and process the *appendages* of modernity (like other 'raw' materials) from what was putatively outside it.

Modernity and tradition, autonomy and derivation, appropriation and indigenism, were co-constituted binaries. Ironically, as oil-based realism, schooled painting, and 'art' as a professional field took shape in India from the mid-19th century, the British Orientalist E.B. Havell (located in the post-1857 colonial logic of selective preservation and intervention)⁴⁸ set out to 'Indianize' art by propagating a revival of crafts/decorative traditions as the manifest destiny of Indian artists cobbled with an antiwesternism geared to indigenist chauvinism rather than anticolonial resistance⁴⁹; European commentators read the presence of European forms and artistic conventions in 19th and early-20th century Persian/Iranian and Awadhi art/architecture as loss of artistic autonomy/authenticity, as sign of moral decadence, as vulgar, offensive or incompetent copies⁵⁰; successive primitivisms and appropriations of non European art into mobile, nonnaturalist, antiethnographic, abstract, disjunctive, subversive form took shape in European modernisms. As 'local' forms were transformed into European forms and traveled back into indigenist claims or appeared as modernist novelty, the 'east' returned through doubled colonial mediation in England and India: the utopian socialist William Morris, a founder of the late 19th-century Arts and Crafts Movement, dented the enduring gendered hierarchy of fine art and crafts/domestic arts in England;⁵¹ yet in a patently feminizing domestication, he recommended the trees, foliage and flowering plants of the *Hamzanama* for tapestry and wall paper design, and positioned it as reinvigorating mass-market ornament.⁵² (As textile production and printing in Britain emulated and replaced Asian imports, Indian and Persian designs and patterns were considered exemplary by Morris and others, and adapted to the

market; this market for oriental fabrics and designs intersected with the Arts and Crafts Movement as well as the exhibitionary complex and the avant garde interest in applied arts). The Bengal Orientalists demoted Mughal art as secular and inauthentic because it was courtly, worldly, and lacking in religious qualities in contradistinction to spiritual and civilizational Hindu-Buddhist art;⁵³ European museums usually incorporated Mughal art as an uncanonized periphery of 'Islamic' art from the early 20th century - even though it was not 'Muslim' per se; this so-called "Muhammedan art" catalysed European modernisms in the 1910s and 1920s but in another twist entered an indigenist vocabulary in Bengal. In the 1920s, Abdur Rehman Chughtai (from a family of artists who traced their ancestry to Persian architects at the Mughal court), positioned in the double lineage of Persianate/Mughal folio traditions and Bengal School Orientalism (following Abanindranath Tagore), drew in the orientalist 'eastern' elements in Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau (especially Aubrey Beardsley), producing a quasi-colonial typology, a poetic rendition of an elite vaguely 'Muslim' feminine, and in a gestural return to folios, painted and printed an illustrated edition of Ghalib's poetry or appended paintings with couplets from the *Rubayyat* of Omar Khayyam.⁵⁴ He exhibited his work at the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, and after 1947, tried to embed Persianate and Mughal (but not regional) folio traditions into the institutionalization of a Pakistani national-modern.

Such continuous re-mediation and meetings between 'other' worlds in both Europe and India relatedly manufactured national/civilizational heritages or resistant cosmopolitan lineages while the 'borrowed' modernism was already deeply implicated in Asian history.⁵⁵ Within the discrete contours of uneven capitalism and empire, the possibilities of a 'modernist' eclecticism were as open to an Indian as to an European artist but the ideological imperatives, mediations, political locations and positions of power differed.

Later, in contrapuntal re-readings, Pakistani feminists mustered transgressive political statements, and dissenting arguments from the hybrid trajectory of miniature traditions in critiques of patriarchal

surveillance, masculinism, militarization and imperialism. Aisha Khalid's *Silence with Pattern* (2000) massifies the decorativeness of Art Nouveau and Mughal, colonial, contemporary fabric fetishes into a claustrophobic veiling while Reeta Saeed's *Sorry for the Inconvenience, Work in Progress* (2001) positions an underfed, downcast donkey bombarded with hamburgers, aerated drinks and of course bombs in front of allegorically inscribed Persianate tortured rocks; Sumaira Tazeen's dowry trunks and jutis draw on Basohli paintings to introject the domestic as a demoted yet insistent interiority⁵⁶; diasporic artists use miniature traditions to layer and erase (Nusra Latif Quereshi in Australia), to mobilize the archive (Raquib Shaw in Britain, Shazia Sikandar in America), or craft a 'multicultural' aesthetic that safeguards ethnicity, and connects with both Britain and Asia (the British painters, Rabindra Singh and Amrit Singh's *Painting the Town Red*, 2008, 'glocalizes' Liverpool).

Modernity did not produce its 'own' subjectivities *sui generis* in India, Pakistan or Europe, but was mediated by extant, residual or peripheral ones whose oppositional force could be renewed in very different historical conjunctures, and whose premises could be positioned as antithetical or opposed to forms of the European, colonial or antiseccular modern and made consonant with subversive, secular, left, feminist projects.

Styles of eclecticism and a critical aesthetic of circulation

The faded pre-Renaissance histories of Eurasian constellations remain significant because the *same* constellations produced quite discrete historical trajectories in South Asia. I cannot describe these here except to note that in India, these earlier West/Central Asian, Persian or Indic cosmopolitanisms and secular imaginings (most vivid in the 15th-17th centuries and at work till the 18th) flitted in and out of the colonial and national-secular imaginary, formed a subterranean current that flowed into the secular modern but were not created by it in the first place; their trans-regional/continental configuration did not belong to the modern nation-state, and could even embarrass it. They composed a *longue duree* that was neither

fully absorbed nor obliterated by colonization. Some pathways and trajectories uneasily joined the colonial and later the secular modern while others remained nascent or undertheorized and signify a historical potential that did not run its course. My claim here is neither for a transhistorical (early) modern that severs modernity from capitalism, nor the presence of 'normative' European modern elements elsewhere, nor to elicit and authenticate an alternate modernity, nor to a simplistic reversal in which Europe belatedly imports an originary modernity, nor even to place Europe and Asia on the same trajectory with alternate routes through their 'own' empires. Rather that specific preceding constellations marked by a precapitalist geographical imagination generated languages that could be consonant with religious pluralism, the secular, or amenable to modernity, but not necessarily with the new extractive economic regimes of capitalism or the fixed boundaries of the nation-state. Thus instead of ratifying the colonial alibi that routinely attributed stagnation or parochialism to colonized countries, or, positioning Europe as 'first' in the race to modernity with others lagging behind or catching up, it may be more useful to note that the *discursive* construction of European modernity as inaugural and (usually) in bleak contradistinction to its predecessors/others was achieved by suppressing the presence of some of the same elements in other regions and reassigning them to Europe.⁵⁷ These elements can reinfect the significations of a modern predicated as much on West/Central Asian, Chinese, Mongol, Turk, Arab lineages as on the European.

Region and nation can become generic concepts, or controlling claims that cordon, block, capture, annex or invisibilize histories of circulation. An admission of mixed pathways or multidirectional diffusion/ appropriation would *weaken all claims to the national* (the Indian as well as those of nationally arrayed European modernisms), and complicate particularist (regional, cultural or civilizational) identities. It would also interfere with the cachet of a more diversified ethnographic local/regional/national that now underpins the global art and literature market.

Such admissions in turn would put the onus not on the ethnographic or cultural uniqueness of a region or nation-space but on a wider grounded visual, narrative, discursive history of circulation and co-constitution. This would be a history of successive styles of eclecticism anchored in the following considerations. First, forms of authorial integration and affiliation; second, types and temporalities of absorption, assimilation and appropriation; third, the historical processes (precapitalist, colonial, decolonizing, globalizing) they refract and internalize in form and genre; fourth, the ideological work they do within specific political economies and conjunctural configurations (nomadic, prenatal, vernacular, metropolitan, nationalist, transnational); fifth, the suturing signs (heterodoxy, influence, inspiration, derivation, adaptation, hybridity, syncretism, crossfertilization, crosscultural encounter, indigenization, transculturation, synchrony, simulation, trace) allotted to them in critical lexicons. Critical vocabularies and their institutionalized matrices carry distributions of power and ideological burdens that open some questions yet foreclose others.

There are distinctions between styles of eclecticism. The most pertinent for my argument are: first, openly acknowledged eclecticism (the reverent fascination of the medieval copy that signals an absence of spectatorial distance, the casual utilization of postproduction aesthetics⁵⁸); second, a vernacular/bazaar eclecticism poised between markets and popular beliefs; third, occulting or singularizing terms (appropriation from high modernist optics of aesthetic autonomy, imagination, innovation, originality); fourth, a recoding, parodic or flattening language of open appropriation (postmodernist)⁵⁹; fifth, a recombinant assemblage from a nonsequential, weightless, infinitely malleable global cybernetic archive (postmaterialist, posthistorical).⁶⁰ These in turn lead into distinctions between hegemonic and counterhegemonic contexts, recuperative and subversive intertextuality, notions of self/signature and possession as well as the peculiar relation between appropriation and commodification, since neither mobility, circulation nor eclecticism are inherently radical. Distinctions also need to be made between individual affinities (affection,

intimacy) or standpoints (countercanonical, critical, dialectical) and the quality of interest (ornamental, allegoric, confiscatory) in the used image/language/text.

The crystallization of Mughal art from several circuits and its own dispersal through varied aesthetics is a story that can perhaps stand in synoptically for older aesthetics of circulation, a patchy history of some of these styles of eclecticism, and provide an entry into a critical aesthetic of circulation.

A critical aesthetic of circulation evidently depends on identifying more than multiple locations of authorship, types of circulation, and their formal and semantic encoding in images/texts. The specific aegis, quality and speed of circulation, its trajectories, circuits and junctures, the places of transmission, formal and semantic transformation, the shift to other mediums, are equally significant. Though akin to cultural studies in the attention to history, class, gendering and all forms of cultural production (e.g. high or low, literary or visual),⁶¹ what distinguishes a critical aesthetic of circulation from period studies (ancient, medieval, early modern, colonial, postcolonial) is the willingness to engage the *longue duree*, the brief conjuncture and an amorphous contemporaneity, as well as the refusal to be inhibited by conventional period (and thus region) brackets which can freeze visual/narrative sequences and loops that may otherwise have varied durations - compressed or elongated - and thematized chronologies.

Within a *longue duree* regional constellations too can become conjunctural.⁶² The shift from transregional to transnational circulation, and within the latter, the shift from the colonial to contemporary forms of accelerated circulation, suggest that a critical aesthetic of circulation contends with morphing vectors. Precapitalist circulation worked through old empires, states, tribes, merchants, pilgrims, travelers, elites, humble artisans and storytellers. With capitalism, circulation - whether appropriative, collaborative, resistant - increasingly followed the transnational arc of capital and worked through colonization, new empires, the nation form, classed literacies, commodification and media. Now cybercirculation, though

simultaneous with slower and relational forms of circulation, easily sheds the encumbrance of region or nation along with the baggage of dense historicity but is inextricable from the commodity form; it redefines as well as conjures new forms of (im)mobility, (dis)affiliation, spatial and temporal imaginaries.

Each transit of image/text brings both resignification and new illegibilities that may collaborate in the production of unevenness. Neither mobility nor circulation can be fetishized. Circulation is bound to acts of subversion and appropriation, the expansion and shrinkage of orality and address, the vexatious ambiguities of reception, translation, self-translation, intertextuality, recontexting or recoding. All these would need to be seen dialectically in relation to apparently stationary forms, images, texts. What did not circulate within and beyond denotated regions? Was the immobile a parochial enclosure, a sign of indifference or rejection, an interlude or a plateau? Does that which cannot circulate continue to change? Can the immobile be as hegemonic or antihegemonic as the mobile? Is that which did not or cannot circulate also be the unmoveable linguistic and semantic substance necessarily left untransmitted by translation? Does that which has been translated retain an integrity or does it contract into a residue, helplessly overwritten and altered by the act of translation - an act now widely recognized as an incomplete, inadequate, never-neutral interpretation that can also misrecognize or violate? Does translation generate nonsynchrony when it leaves behind what it cannot reproduce (especially the temporality encrypted in an image/text)? Does translation create, dialectically, both the mobile and the immobilized (untranslatable) image/text? Which discontinuities, ruptures, and negations does circulation induce or leap across?

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NOTES:

1. Francesca Orsini has critiqued “the single language object/tradition” of Hindi and Urdu studies, the problems in perceiving the “Hindi belt” as monolingual or as a region, and makes a strong case for a multilingual literary culture in 15th-16th century north India from a comparative perspective that takes in cosmopolitan and vernacular languages, written archives and oral performances, and texts and genres that ‘circulated’ in the same place and at the same time although they were ‘transmitted’ in separate traditions. (Orsini 2012: 227-28).
2. ‘New’ historical regions have been pitted against Eurocentrism - e.g Euro Mediterranean, Afro-Eurasia, the black Atlantic (slavery), the Indian Ocean world (trade), and the Hemispheric (the Americas).
3. See Sangari 2013.
4. See Goody 2010: 38,41. On the rich periods of cultural production from the 9th century in Baghdad, Bukhara or Persian Transoxania, marked by forms of individuation, cosmopolitanism, rebellion against conventions, scepticism, “secularism” and “humanism,” and the enormous transfer of goods, information and knowledge between “east” and “west,” see Goody 2010: 109-10, 100, 31, 141. On the intensified circulation of goods and people that encompassed Asia and Europe from the mid-16th century, Central Asia as a crossroads for itinerant merchants and migrating peoples, and the Indian Ocean trade from 1400 to 1800, see Frank 2002: 63, 82-83. 85-89. On trade circulations from the 9th to 12th century in Eurasia, see Flood 2009. On Chinese motifs in Persian painting, see Barry 2004: 92, 128-30, 282-87, 314-15, and Gray 1962: 9, 12, 17.
5. Goody 2010: 118, 31; see also Abu Lughod 2008. These networks were also the site of religious syncretism and gradual or partial conversion (Bentley 1993).
6. Goody: 2010: 20-21, 141. Precolonial Europe, as Jack Goody, R.I.Moore and Martin Bernal have demonstrated, was a Euro-Asian and Euro-African phenomenon. The “Islamic lands” stretching from Spain to India and the east constituted “an enormous, contiguous, relatively stable, low duty commercial zone.” Hellenic and Byzantine scholarship and philosophy as translated and

incorporated in Arab scholarship was later taken up in western Europe. Secularization in Europe drew on preChristian pagan myths, classical nontranscendental traditions and sceptical tendencies, the heterodox thinking of the Middle Ages became part of a broader movement confining the operations of the repressive church to “spiritual” spheres, though the suppression of alternate views continued till the 18th century (Goody 2010: 121, 12, 106, 126, 129, 36, 62, 82-83; Barry 2004:124). On the multitextured cosmopolitanism of Islam, a “harbinger” of early modernity that provincializes Europe, and European cosmopolitanism as “late, derivative and reluctant,” see Pieterse 2007: 158-63. On Arab philosophers as not mere trustees or passive transmitters of Greek philosophy to the Renaissance but as critical and creative contributors, see Hobson 2006: 114; Trojanow and Hoskote 2012: 41, 78-95. On the Renaissance as a “Eurasian phenomenon” or set of processes involving the Ottoman world, see Inglis et al 2006: 94, 97-104.

7. See Goody 2010: 67.
8. Barry 2004: 130, 201.
9. Barry’s phrase 2004: 65.
10. There are signs of this confluence and painters adjusting styles to suit patrons/clients during the sultanate (see Mitter 2001: 103-04, 99,114). Hybrid painting styles emerged from the interaction of provincial and Persian elements in Jain paintings; a 15th-century *Shahnama* uses Indian and Persian painting conventions e.g. Indian women are fullbosomed while Persian women are flat chested (ibid: 101). See also Goswamy 2011.
11. See Stronge 2002: 30-34, 111; Mitter 2001: 123, 99. Mughal painters were aware of 10th-century Tantric Buddhist and 12th-century Jain illustrated texts (Mitter ibid: 99). In the *Hamzanama*, different conventions to portray humans, landscape and architecture show that artists working with different traditions worked on each page (Stronge ibid: 23, 30).
12. On Jahangir’s collection, see Mitter 2001: 128. Such collections were common in Central Asian courts e.g. Suleyman (1494-1566), the Ottoman ruler, collected trophies including art objects, icons and illuminated manuscripts through tribute, luxury trade and loot from Europe, China, West and Central

- Asia (Rogers and Ward 1988: 29-32).
13. See Schimmel 2004: 273, 275, 277, 282; Mitter 2001: 121, 123-4, Barry 2004: 76-77; Leach 1998: 53; Asher and Talbot 2007: 138; Stronge 2002: 114, 158-59; Topsfield 2008: 32, 42, 80. On Akbar and Jahangir's fascination with Christian art and for an inventory of Christian images in Mughal art, see Amaladass and Lowner 2012: 35-90. In *Deposition from the Cross* (1598), Christ's deposition is juxtaposed with the Last Judgement (Mitter *ibid.*: 124).
 14. Kesu Das represented himself in a self portrait as a brahmin (see Okada 2012).
 15. Rahimieh 2011: 297-79.
 16. Barry 2004: 376, 378. There is a similar device on the top left of *Jahangir Visits the Hindu Ascetic Jadrup*, illustration to the *Jahangirnama* by Govardhan, Agra, 1616-20.
 17. See Mitter 2001: 130.
 18. In *Shah Jahan Standing on a Globe* by Hashim (c. 1618-29), the emperor, dressed in flowered leggings, is offered the crown and sword of kingship by European-style winged cherubs from a cloud-swirled heaven above; a third cherub holds a canopy on which Shah Jahan's lineage from Timur is inscribed (see Leach 1998: 165). See also *Emperor Jahangir Standing on a Globe with a Safavid Ruler*; and a lifesize painting of Jahangir sitting on a European-style throne holding a globe that is smaller than the nimbus of light around his head (attributed to Abu'l Hasan, c. 1617), which blends Safavid with European conventions. The Mughals claimed a direct family connection to Central Asian Turko-Mongol Timurids, while the Ottomans, less literally, saw themselves as the heirs of Central Asian Timurids.
 19. Schimmel 2004: 279, 283; Topsfield 2008: 82.
 20. Thus a "Letter to the Learned of the West" written by Abul Fazl on behalf of Akbar in 1582 reads: "It has been said by the wise that whoever borrows knowledge from the other countries and enlightens himself by the light of the other people's wisdom, penetrates all mysteries." Cited in Vanina 2004: 169.
 21. Subramanyan 1992: 26-27.
 22. A triangulation of *Prince Khusro sees Queen Shirin Bathing* (an illustration by Sultan Muhammad of the *Khamasa* of Nizami,

- Tabriz, 1539-43), *A Courtesan from Deccan* (Golconda?, c. 1630-50) and *Decorative Figure Against an Ornamental Background 1925-26* (by Henri Matisse) opens up these bifurcating histories.
23. Hillenbrand 2010: 205; Barry 2004: 28-9.
 24. Catalogue, cited in Shalem 2010: 3. Emphasis added.
 25. Cited in Labrusse 2010: 27. Emphasis added.
 26. Hillenbrand 2010: 217.
 27. Both had traveled previously to north Africa (Troelenburg 2010: 60).
 28. This process had counterparts in literary modernism, e.g. T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats.
 29. Cited in Kapur 2000: 7.
 30. Matisse's traversal of Persian art was noted by his contemporaries. See Labrusse 2010: 29.
 31. On the ideology of European diffusionism and cultural internalism and its 'Hindu' counterparts, see Sangari 1999: xxix, 410.
 32. Complex histories of multidirectional interanimation and interaction were blocked by a narcissistic narrative of outward diffusion of Buddhism/Hinduism in which whatever returned (including Sufism) was an altered image of itself; and by a narrative of the powerful absorptive capacities of a Hinduism (defined as inherently synthetic/syncretic) in which whatever entered the subcontinent was remoulded by it. British Orientalism and this expansive Hinduism often worked in tandem from the 19th century.
 33. Rahul Sankrityayana is an emblematic figure here in his passages from the Indian National Congress to the Communist Party of India, from Vaishnav to Arya Samaj to the Buddhist and Marxist, from Sanskrit to Arabic and Persian; the restoration and translation of lost Buddhist texts from China and Tibet and tracking the itineraries of Chinese travelers and of Buddhism till Dunhuang. His magisterial millennial panorama of Central Asian history and settler waves to establish a syncretic tale of class society with sparks of constant resistance (*Volga se Ganga* 1943 and *Madhya Asia ka Itihas* 1956) was intended to *shed* insularity but also *affirm* a subcontinental/ Indian civilization and heritage.

34. There were similarities in class and gendering processes across regional, colonial and metropolitan divides in the coeval spaces of capital, nation formation or urbanization, and within these coordinates, similar genres or forms could emerge independently.
35. On the juxtaposition generated by colonialism, radical juxtaposition of differences in the matrix of the modern, and now as a way of thinking about comparison, see Layoun 2009: 584-85. On contrapuntal reading, see Said 1993.
36. Defoe 1981: 120, 134-5.
37. Blends of Rajasthani and Mughal (and through it, Persianate) traits appear by the 17th century in Bikaner, Marwar and Mewar (see Leach 1998: 99, 105, 136, 139-40, 184; Aitken 2010: 26-36, 76-77, 84-87). Mughalized painting was incorporated in Kota and Bundi, and dominated the mid-17th century court of Mandi; some painters moved between Mughal and Rajput patronage, and some Rajput courts like Amber and Jodhpur employed painters in the Mughal style. B.N. Goswamy's research discloses that the *kalam* of painter families overrides the strict demarcation of regional schools (Goswamy and Fischer 1992: 213-17, 272, 292).
38. In Delhi, the same artists worked in similar or differing styles for diverse patrons - the late Mughal court, Delhi satellite courts and Europeans - providing many extraordinary points of interaction (Dalrymple and Sharma 2012: 10, 41-2, 47-50).
39. In the foreground of a *A Girl Draws Forth Quicksilver* (Mughal c. 1740), a woman huntress rides away from a gushing well of mercury (an item of European trade at the time) while the gaggle of European traders/spectators on the top right corner are balanced and contained by the calm figure of a hookah-smoking hermit on the top left.
40. For instance, *Akbar II in Darbar with British Resident Charles Metcalfe*, attributed to Ghulam Murtaza Khan, Delhi, c. 1811-15; and *Colonel James Skinner Holding a Regimental Darbar* by Ghulam Ali Khan, 1827.
41. Dalrymple and Sharma 2012: 11-12.
42. Amaladass and Lowner 2012: 41.
43. On the orientalism of Selfridges, a department store in early 20th-century London, see Mica Nava 2007: 22-24, 32, 37, 39;

- she, however, interprets commercial orientalism as 'emancipating' for Euroamerican women.
44. For instance, harem pants and jupe-cullottes were in high fashion in the 1910s but Turkish trousers and pantaloons were first adopted by some feminists in mid-19th century US while simpler uncorseted silhouettes came to the US from China, Japan, Persia and Arabia (Edwards 2000: 227-29, 232; Hoganson 2003: 269).
45. See Wollen 2008: 1-3. On similar balls and fetes in early 20th century London and Paris based on an Arabian Nights dress code which featured slaves, see Nava 2007: 31; Edwards 2000: 229.
46. Cited in Higashi 2002: 301.
47. See Sangari 1999: xxviii-xxix, 102-115.
48. On the indigenism produced by this colonial logic, see Sangari 1999: xxvi.
49. Havell did however note that the rise of nationalist consciousness and protest against the denationalization of Indian art could lead to an "anti-British movement" (see Michael 2012: 225). He became the superintendent of the Calcutta School of Art in 1896.
50. Flood 2007: 36-37.
51. Domestic arts were the province of women and fine arts were only available to middle class women until the end of the 19th century, a hierarchy that persisted into the 20th century.
52. Cited in Stronge 2002: 21. Sixty folios of the *Hamzanama* shown at the Vienna World Fair of 1873 were acquired by a museum and displayed at Munich 1910 (Haslauer 2010: 277-8).
53. See Guha-Thakurta 1992: 179-82, 157, 209. On the consequences of this ideological reading of Mughal art as secular yet 'Muslim', see Sangari 2013: 136-39.
54. See for instance *The Resting Place*, untitled Kashmir woodcutter, untitled old musician, *Fragrance*, *Dupatta*, *Zebunissa*. He also painted several mythological themes, e.g. *Yasoda Arjuna*.
55. See Sangari 1999: 25.
56. *Heritage 3* (2001), *Belongings* (2002) and *Possessions* (2002). The work of Ayesha Durrani and Chicago-based Saira Wasim belongs to this critical constellation.

57. Precapitalist and prenatal cosmopolitanisms display some of the *same* features now attributed to the European early modern: contact between diverse peoples, transregional networks, syncretization etc. See also Sangari 1999: xxiii-iv.
58. In Nicolas Bourriard's Postproduction (2002) contemporary art is "a set of activities linked with the service industry and recycling," the artist one who "inserts their own work into that of others," and "the issue no longer to fabricate an object, but to choose one amongst those that exist, and use or modify it according to a specific intention" (cited in Hatherley 2009:154).
59. The question of the legibility of one form of eclecticism to another would arise. Thus modernist appropriations were eclectic and often subversive at 'home' but tutelary abroad since colonialism could repress the recognition of earlier connective and eclectic forms. There is also a distinct relation between colonial appropriation by European modernisms and postmodern eclecticism (see Sangari 1999: 25).
60. New chronotopes in art and literary practice readily traverse, disjoin or connect different historical times, register these as malleable temporalities or (cyber) spaces.
61. Cultural studies was also predicated on a formal model of circulation traversing production-reception circuits mediated by lived experience, forms, canons, genres and conventions.
62. As Asian countries occupy the position of creditors, become large players in financial markets, some forms of crossregional co-operation within the global south bypass Euroamerica, and art and literature markets follow in tandem. With the greater integration of bourgeoisies of different countries, and shifting centres of contemporary collection, investment, translation, there has been a double resignification of Asian art and literature in relation to both the 'west' and new Asian markets.

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Ganesh Devy

VERRIER ELWIN'S TRIBAL WORLD AND THE TRIBAL VIEW OF ELWIN'S WORLD *

I

It was in the early 1980s that I first attended a major conference on Comparative Literature in India. This was held in Delhi and had attracted participation of practically everybody who mattered in Indian Comparative Literature. Being young and not being familiar with the historical trajectory of Comparative Literature, I had argued in that conference that Comparative Literature as then constituted would not provide adequate interpretative or theoretical substance to the study of bewilderingly diverse literature in Indian languages. But, once I started looking more closely at the issues involved, my initial scepticism started turning into an open acceptance. This led me to examining the difficulties arising out of the mutual complicity between Anthropology, Orientalism and Comparative Literature in order to see if a universal comparatism was available as an option to a post-colonial literary critic. My quest did not arise from any desire to establish parity between western literature and Indian literature. Rather it was to see if the historical process of our internalization of western distribution of imaginative life into Anthropology for the 'savage communities', Orientalism for the 'old and tired cultures' and Comparative Literature for the 'modern nations' had not resulted in our inability to grasp the oral and tribal literature in India. The question was, "Did the European

* This is an extended version of the article published in *Anthropologists, Indigenous Scholars and Research Endeavour: Seeking Bridges Towards Mutual Respect*, edited Joy Hendry and Laura Fitznor, New York: Routledge, 2012.

stereotyping of the colonised mind result in an internal stereotyping of the marginal and remote communities and cultures by Indian literary scholars?" Similarly, was there a counter-stereotyping of the 'main-stream' literary imagination by the communities and cultures pushed to the margins? To this end it was necessary to understand how Anthropology views Indian tribal communities and how the tribal communities view Anthropology. The dialectic offers an enormous amount of learning for Comparative Literature in India, particularly as Indian scholars have developed over the last three decades significant insights related to colonialism and patriarchy. The first major attempt to bring face to face Anthropology and Indigenous Studies for a dialogue was the Building Bridges conference organized by Professor Joy Hendry at Oxfordbrookes in 2009.

I went to the Building Bridges conference at Oxford Brookes as a 'tribal activist' and without any significant knowledge of Anthropology. Among the participants, there were several eminent Anthropologists as well as advocates of Indigenous Studies. Back home in India at the Adivasi Academy, the institute for Indigenous Studies I founded, I had been talking for over a decade about the need for what was crudely termed as 'reverse Anthropology'. Therefore, to find Anthropologists themselves trying to build bridges between their field and Indigenous Studies was to see an intellectual combat at close quarters. During the discussion, I realised that the forces on both sides were engaged in the same pursuit, their anxieties just as shared, and indeed that they had better make a common cause, for both the sides have a fairly similar battle to fight for recovering 'understanding' out of a wide array of stereotypes arising in altogether different quarters.

Perhaps, one of the minimum definitions of Anthropology may be that it is an attempt at 'understanding' human groups within a social framework. The understanding aimed at is not so much a hermeneutical explication as a snapshot of the being of the given social cluster. An Anthropological exercise can at best be descriptive while the social structures and phenomena that it seeks to describe are of necessity dynamic in nature. At its most perceptive,

Anthropology can offer us the brilliance of the Lacanian 'gaze' (Lacan 1988: 215) and, at its worst it offers no more than a translated version of the political orthodoxy.

Indigenous Studies, described simplistically, is the post-colonial rejoinder to the canonical Anthropology whose foundations are seen intertwined with the colonial advent. It is more of a self-expression of what had formerly been the 'Anthropological subject', an attempt to unweave the stereotypes so as to recover the lost selfhood. However, a close scrutiny of the history of the discipline does not bear out this simplistic antithesis. Rather, one is likely to find that both Anthropology and Indigenous Studies are essentially fictional, one a third person narrative and the other a first person narrative. Of course, fiction is perhaps the most perceptive way of speaking about reality. However, it is when one juxtaposes the 'understanding' posited by Anthropology with the 'misunderstandings' circulated and settled within the discourse of power and politics, one notices that in many ways Anthropology is quite a logical forerunner of Indigenous Studies. The life and work of Verrier Elwin¹ may illustrate how fiction created by Anthropology receives but an unfair hearing, and how Indigenous Studies gets anticipated by Anthropology. My comments, however, are restricted merely to the question of 'understanding' and are not intended to salvage Anthropology of its ethical transgressions.

II

The British colonial rule in India was not only a political and economic enterprise; it was also an experiment in restructuring a complex society. For the first two centuries of colonial contact, beginning with the arrival of the East India Company at Surat in 1600 to the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Bengal towards the end of the 18th century, the colonial imagination had great difficulties in understanding the complex weave of the Indian society. Out of these difficulties arose many misconceptions and myths about communities and social conventions. At times these were as comical as the idea that India is a country of snake charmers and magicians.

But in many instances the wrong reading of the society resulted in untold human misery. This very same 'knowledge' formed the basis for formulating law during colonial times. The story of the communities known as 'denotified' is without doubt the most mind-boggling tale of inhuman collapse of compassion.

During the 1830s, the colonial government appointed William Henry Sleeman (1788–1856) to prepare a list of instances of assaults on wayfarers in central India. He took to this task with an amazing devotion and produced a voluminous list of violent episodes. The list would not have amounted to much had it not been for the turn of events during 1857 in central India. In the wake of the battles fought and lost by the Indian states, all isolated and potential groups of soldiers, and even those who were likely to be in the supply chain for them, came to be seen as candidates for the Sleeman-list. Later it was this list that became the basis of the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act (CTA).²

In the CTA the terms 'tribe' and 'gang' were used interchangeably. These 'gangs' or 'tribes' were subjected by the CTA to a descriptive tag of 'criminal tribes'. Their traditional occupations were rendered 'illegal'. For instance, the traditional coin makers were presented as counterfeiters and the wandering mendicants were presented as thugs: The provisions of the CTA read:

If such a tribe, gang or class has no fixed place of residence, the report shall state whether such tribe, gang, or class follows any lawful occupation, and Government shall state, the real occupation of such tribe, gang, or class, or a pretence for the purpose of facilitating the commission of the crimes, and shall set forth the ground on which such opinion is based; and the report shall also specify the place of residence in which such wandering tribe, gang, or class were proposed to be made for enabling it to learn its living therein (Devy 2007: 139).

Once the traditional occupations of the nomadic and semi-nomadic communities were brought under the scanner, the colonial government provided for their being officially declared 'criminal tribes'.

If upon the consideration of such report, the Governor-General in council is satisfied that the tribe, gang, or class to which it relates ought to be declared criminal, and that the means by which it is proposed that such the tribe, gang, or class shall earn its living are adequate, he may authorize the local government to publish in the local Gazette a notification declaring that such a tribe, gang, or class is a criminal tribe, and thereupon the provision of this act shall become applicable to such the tribe, gang, or class (Devy 2007: 139).

The government's powers to declare a community 'criminal' were made arbitrary to the extent that the question of inclusion of a given community in the list was taken completely out of the judiciary's purview. The CTA stated:

No court of justice shall question the validity of any such notification on the ground that the provision therein before contained, or any of them, have not been complied with, or entertain in any form whatever the question whether they have been complied with; but every such notification shall be conclusive proof that the provisions of this act are applicable to the tribe, gang, or class specified therein (Devy 2007:140).

After this, even an attempt to move out of the district without informing the local authorities became a punishable offence. The act of questioning the notification in any form too came to be seen as a criminal offence. The colonial government's right to detain such communities and to do whatever the government decided to do with their lives also came to be seen as a lawful right and duty of the government officials. The officials were charged to prepare Registers of Criminal Tribes; and once a register was prepared for a given district, even the very same official was not allowed to make any deletions in it. The nature of the declaration was made entirely non-negotiable and absolutely final. The victims of this draconian law were given no reprieve. The onus of proving that they were not criminal fell on them, but they were left with no rational argument since their being born in a certain community

itself was seen as a crime. The persons belonging to these tribes had to spend their entire lives proving to the authorities without any specific reason that they were not criminal. Thus, life itself became a trial for them without any let up whatsoever. The communities 'Notified' under the act acquired the form of some 'social raw material' for use in empire-building. The members of these communities came to be used in the colonial construction projects of railways and factories. The law provided for the authority to bundle up and shunt them as and where they were of use:

Any tribe, gang or class, which has been declared to be criminal, or any part thereof, may, by order of the local government, be removed to any other place of residence (Devy 2007: 140).

Even children were not viewed with any special sympathy. The government decided that the Superintendent of the specific settlement was to be asked to function as the 'mother' for the children. Besides, the Superintendent was given the authority to put the children to unpaid labour if it was thought necessary to discipline them.

The superintendent of a reformatory settlement for children shall be deemed to be the guardian, within the meaning of Act No. XIX of 1850 (concerning the binding of apprentices), of every child detained in such settlement; and such superintendent, may if he shall think fit, and subject to any rule which the local government may make in this behalf, apprentice such child under the provision of the aforesaid act (Devy 2007: 140).

The sordid saga continued without any significant alteration in the provisions of the CTA for over seven decades, a good three generations. The infamous CTA asked for forced 'isolation' and 'reform' of the communities listed. These included coin makers, entertainers, petty traders, migratory peasants, wandering groups, nomadic communities, long-distance traders and many others.

The CTA required creation of 'settlements' as reformatories. The Settlements required 'strict procedures'. These procedures kept becoming increasingly inhuman. Forced labour became the daily fate of the inmates. The CTA of 1871 went through several revisions, every revision bringing in new forms of 'punishment' for being born within the listed communities.

The last of the CTA was passed in 1924. By then a total of 191 communities had been brought under its purview. The total population of all these communities 'Notified' under the successive CTAs is, at present, nearly 60 million. That is about 5% of the Indian population.³

Elwin inherited this kind of ethnographic engineering as the background. It is these stereotypes about nomadic communities, and though different in substance, not different in style, imagery of Adivasis – the tribals – that Elwin had to counter.

III

To be Verrier Elwin, born in England, engaged almost entirely in the tribal communities in India, and writing for an audience that had not yet emerged as a literary class, was altogether difficult. To pass such a life required an Elwin-like sense of adventure, purpose, excitement and humility. If Elwin laid bare before the world the great civilisation of Indian tribal communities, those communities had been conceptualised as the primitive faction of the Indian society by the colonial government. The story extends back to the 18th century. The term 'tribal' was in use among European merchants and travellers in India from the 17th century; but it was used to designate just any community. It was brought to use in a specific sense for only certain communities as a result of a series of conflicts between those communities and the colonial rulers.

About the same time as the formulation of the CTA, the colonial government produced another list of the Tribes of India. These were the communities that had come in conflict with the British rule on the issue of the sovereignty over the forest areas. During the 1860s, the British had created a Forest Department, primarily to provide

good quality timber for building railways and naval ships. The forest dwelling communities in India opposed the colonial take over of their forests. They neither cared for the colonial government nor did they understand the idiom of the British law. Not surprisingly, most of these conflicts were often violent and involved armed clashes. Since the political idioms of the conflicting parties were radically divergent, it became difficult for the colonial rule and its diplomacy to forge treaties with the forest dwelling communities. Communities located at all such areas of conflict were bundled together by the colonial government within the term 'tribe'. Soon after the need to conceptualize 'tribes' became stronger, a sophisticated machinery of scholarship was put in place to enumerate, describe and define the Indian tribes. The historical, linguistic and cultural differences among these communities were so vast and complex that it would have been impossible for any rational scheme of sociological classification to place them in a single social category. While all this was happening in India's political history, already a branch of Orientalism in Europe had emerged in the form of Anthropology, perhaps more appropriately Savageology. Some of the attributes discussed in Savageology were applied to the Indian 'tribes', and tribes came to be seen as necessarily primitive. By the end of the 19th century, the concept of tribe and the notion of criminal tribes had received acceptance even among the educated Indians, writers, journalists and lawyers. And so, when the 1891 Criminal Tribes Act made a comprehensive addition to the 1871 list of the branded 'tribes', or when the following year the register of forest codes was prepared, there was no evident protest from any quarter. By the turn of the century, the tribe had come to stay as an unchallenged category constitutive of the primitive in the Indian society.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the resistance movement that opposed the British rule showed no interest in questioning the wisdom of the British scholarship that had been constructing various images of Indian society. The communities that the colonial scholarship had constructed as the primitive continued to be seen as primitive. The political leadership of the Indian freedom

movement showed no interest in recognizing tribal rights or the historical contribution that the communities had made during the 19th century. The freedom movement spearheaded by the Congress had a genuine interest in reviving the rural economy; but the social complexities of the rural and traditional communities in India did not count much in the Congress thinking on economy. These were submerged under the fascination for the post-revolution Russian Socialism or the Gandhian understanding of the village as the hub for a cottage industry. The tribal had been essentially a political premise; and the colonial government had managed to seal it off from the 20th century social hermeneutics of India. It was natural, therefore, that by the time Elwin made his first trip to a tribal area, the tribals had already become a forgotten issue in Indian politics and society. It was Elwin's historic burden to re-examine the category, turn it upside down and gain sympathy, if not respectability, for the tribes. He carried out this seemingly impossible task with an unparalleled dedication.

Given the timing of Elwin's arrival in India, it is not surprising that the young Elwin felt attracted towards Mahatma Gandhi. However, it was not Gandhi but Jamanalal Bajaj, Thakkar Bapa and Sardar Patel who drew Elwin's attention to tribals. Thakkar Bapa provided Elwin the initial exposure to tribals by taking him to Dahod and Jhalod. Elwin arrived in India in November 1927; he finally decided to move to Karanjia in Mandla District in January 1931. He came in close contact with Gandhi during 1930, and started spending time at the Sabarmati Ashram and traveling with associates of Gandhi to various parts of India. Gandhi was not just the most popular leader that India has known, he was also, and perhaps more essentially, a moral universe. Though Elwin came under the spell of this moral universe, he decided to trespass it in favour of his quest for understanding the tribals. He was austere in his habits – for almost 15 years he walked bare foot – but he could not tolerate making a fetish of not drinking and other such characteristics associated with a 'good' satyagrahi. For him to follow Gandhi was not so much to undertake a *sadhna* but to understand and articulate poetry of a kind.

From the day in January 1932 that Elwin and Shamrao Hivale, who continued to be his life-long associate, started out in a bullock cart with only a couple of hundred rupees between them through the jungle of the Maikal Hills, to the very end of his life, Elwin spent over three decades living among the tribals, serving them, learning their languages and culture, documenting oral traditions, preparing policy documents, advising the government on tribal issues and writing about them. The turbulent years of the freedom movement and the world-war formed the backdrop of Elwin's work. After arriving in India, Elwin did not return to England for any long spells, and once he moved to his first tribal village, his contact with cities became reduced. If he was in touch with the rest of the world, it was mainly through his reading, which provided him a certain resonance with modern times. The police persecution that he had to face owing to his affiliation with the freedom movement, and the censure by the Church that he invited upon himself, gave him a sense of being a hero and a martyr. But, all these other sides of his life increasingly kept becoming far less significant for him in comparison to his profound attraction for the tribal communities and his deep emotional ties with them. He liked to describe his life philosophy as the philosophy of love:

Love and the duties it imposes is the real lesson of the forest ... Among very poor and exploited people there was the need to maintain those imponderable values that give dignity to the life of man; to restore them their self-respect, the feeling of being loved ... There was the need for reverence, reverence for all life (Elwin 1988: 348).

It was the sequential unfolding of his many-sided love for the tribals during the three decades of an intimate engagement with them that led to Elwin's production of such mighty works as *The Baiga*, *The Agariya*, *Maria Murder and Suicide*, *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal*, *Folk-Songs of Chattisgarh*, *The Muria and the Ghotul*, *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, *The Myths of Middle India*, *Songs of the Forest*, *Folk-Songs of the Maikal Hills*, *Leaves from the*

Jungle and The Aborigines and Bondo Highlanders. Had Elwin's style possessed no literary charm, had his prose not reflected an alluring personality, had he not lavished such profound love on the communities that he researched, and had he not belonged to an exciting era, even then just the wealth of information that Elwin's numerous works contain would have made his contribution phenomenal.

Elwin's love for the tribal communities of India has almost no parallels, with the exception perhaps of Mahasweta Devi and Shankar Guha-Niyogi⁴. His involvement with them went far beyond an anthropological dedication, aesthetic fascination or altruistic community work. Through the decades of his work, Elwin became increasingly aware that defending tribal well-being was his responsibility. In 1959, he was asked by the Ministry of Home Affairs to prepare a report of tribal development. He argued in it that for any development plan for tribals to succeed, it must acquire a 'tribal touch', 'we must look, if we can, at things through tribal eyes and from the tribal point of view.' Respect for the tribal way of life and tribal culture was the bedrock of the policy he proposed for tribals. Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Foreword' to Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA* (the North-East Frontier Agency) captures the essential features of Elwin's approach to tribal development:

We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take an interest in them. In the world of today that is just not possible or desirable. At the same time we should avoid over-administering these areas and in particular; sending too many outsiders into their territory.

It is between these two extreme positions that we have to function. Development in various ways there has to be, such as communication, medical facilities, education and better agriculture. These avenues of development should, however, be pursued within the broad framework of the following five fundamental principles:

First: people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing any thing on them. We

should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture;

Second: Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected;

Third: We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

Fourth: We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.

Fifth: We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved (Elwin 1960: Foreword).

IV

Elwin had spent his years with tribals till 1950 solely in central India. It was not till 1947 that he made his first visit to any of the north-eastern states. Travelling to Nagaland was not easily possible for him, for he was till then a 'foreign national'. It was in 1953 that the government of India decided to establish a special branch of the Civil Services for the North-East. Elwin was initially asked to assist the government with the selection of officers for this new cadre, and then to move to the north-east frontier as an advisor. As the years passed, he was given further responsibilities of setting up a tribal research institute and providing policy inputs. Previously, Elwin was known as an Anthropologist, a scholar, writer, a friend of tribals and a Gandhian of sorts. It was during the last 15 years of his life that he emerged as an administrator and a policy maker for tribal development. In that role, Elwin left a lasting impact in the field of tribal development. However, despite his move to Shillong as a policy consultant, Elwin's concern for tribals rights did not diminish. This is evidenced in his comments on the impact of his own work on the Muria institution of Ghotul:

My memories of life in Bastar and Orissa are, like my memories of Oxford, inconsolable. I shall never see, no one will ever see, the Muria ghotual as I saw it, or the Saoras as I saw them. It may be that I myself helped by my very presence to destroy what I so much admired (Elwin 1988: 193).

Or again, his agonised response to the indignity that tribal prisoners have to suffer in Indian prisons:

The NEFA tribesman, who is taken down from the mountains and sent to prison in the plains, suffers, in addition to the inevitable sense of isolation, the affront to human dignity, the loneliness and despair that afflict all prisoners, special deprivations. The heat of the plains is almost unknown to a hillman. It is probable that no one knows his language ... Some of us have been very keen to have a special jail for our tribal people, which will be a place of healing and restoration and where the whole idea of punishment and revenge will be banished (Elwin 1988: 159).

The government of India did not have a separate ministry of tribal affairs till 1999. When the new ministry was established, an attempt was made to draft a new tribal policy. The document produced by the ministry was so unwieldy that it soon had to be abandoned by the government. In his time, Elwin produced a policy for tribal development which to this day remains the seminal document relating tribal development. At present, there are 87 million of them. The work of Verrier Elwin, a man born in Kent who had accidentally arrived in a tribal village in 1930, continues to influence the destinies of these millions. Had it not been for him perhaps independent India would not have liked to acknowledge that tribals exist in this country.

V

The terms 'caste' and 'tribe' have stuck to Indian society ever since the Portuguese travel writers and missionaries decided to describe in these terms the vast variety of ethnic and occupational groups

and sects of the Indian sub-continent. The result is that today no Indian describes Indian society without taking recourse to the categories 'caste' and 'tribe'. In the initial period of India's contact with western nations the two terms were used as synonyms, any difference between them lay only in the social status of the groups they described. The colonial rulers finally shattered the synonymy through a legal intervention when an official list of communities was prepared in 1872 as the list of Indian tribes. Since then the 'tribes' or 'Adivasis', as they themselves like to be described, have come to be perceived as a distinct segment of Indian society. History has indeed been extremely unkind to the Adivasis people in India. None of their brave fights against the British has ever been treated as part of the 'national' struggle for freedom. From the Bihar uprising of 1778 to Lakshman Naik's revolt in Orissa in 1942, the Adivasis of India repeatedly rebelled against the British in the Northeast, Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

The condition of healthcare delivery and educational infrastructure in the areas inhabited by the 87 million Adivasis has been woefully pathetic. Adivasi land is continuously alienated, their villages constantly threatened with displacement caused by various 'development' projects, their access to forest produce increasingly restricted and their balanced ecology hugely disrupted by vast mining projects.

Constitutional guarantees for protecting Adivasi interests do not seem to get translated into any significant increase in livelihood support and food security for them. Large-scale migrations, frequent starvation deaths, seasonal unemployment, harassment from petty officials and a perpetual indebtedness to usurious money-lenders continue to haunt the lives of India's Adivasis, barring a miniscule 'creamy layer' among them.

In 2004, the NDA government came up with the idea of preparing a National Policy for Adivasis. The main theme of the policy draft produced was 'mainstreaming' them. With the UPA government's coming to power, a new draft was produced. Apparently, the draft had all the right kind of rhetoric. The draft

was prepared just about the time when the bill for acknowledging Adivasi rights on land under the Forest Department was being shaped. The bill was moved with the expectation that it would ensure that Adivasis will get titles to the agricultural land that they had traditionally cultivated. The bill became an Act, though its implementation has been alarmingly slow and half-hearted. But, if the bill was at least taken forward, the draft policy made no further progress. At this juncture the Adivasi communities and the civil society engaged with Adivasi issues have no clear idea as to what is happening to the policy draft.

Just when the policy draft was in preparation, the UPA government took up the related and a far more complex issue of Denotified and Nomadic Communities that had remained entirely neglected since their Denotification in 1950s. After Independence, the Iyengar Committee was constituted in 1950 to think of redeeming these victims of colonial savagery. The process of 'denotification' began in 1952. The CTAs promulgated in various Indian states were annulled and replaced by the Habitual Offenders Act (HOA). But by the time the HOAs were framed and the Denotification was completed, the Schedules of Tribes and Castes had already been constituted. Hence, the denotified and nomadic communities did not find an easy entry in these categories. Some of them were given the status of Scheduled Tribes; some communities were admitted as Scheduled Castes, others communities continued to languish. The country, and the successive governments, did almost nothing to change the sad situation of the DNTs. It was in 1998 that the DNT Rights Action Group (RAG) was formed in Baroda as an advocacy group. The national campaign that the RAG ran resulted in the appointment of a technical advisory group and a National Commission. The reports of these two bodies are under consideration of the Ministry of Social Justice.

In the meanwhile, the DNTs of India continue to suffer inhuman treatment from all sections of the society and from the law-keeping agencies. Nothing short of a major structural change in the form of a strong protective law will bring about the desired change and

bring freedom to these communities. They have waited for a nearly a century and a half to get freedom. Their wait continues!

In Australia, the Prime Minister officially tendered in 2008 an apology for devastating the 'lost generations' of the indigenous people there. At this point of time, in India the Grey Hound Academy was being expanded to deal with tribal militancy. It is the same fear and suspicion that have now resulted in the Operation Green Hunt. It is indeed sad that innocent persons from the paramilitary forces are losing their lives, and indeed some of the tribal villagers are held to ransom in the name of an armed revolution. Such violence cannot be justified on any ground and it needs to be dealt with within the framework of the constitutional means available to us. However, it needs to be asked if as a nation we have really thought deeply about the place of the Adivasis and the notified communities in modern India. Besides, it needs to be recognised that the situation is not entirely local and restricted to India alone. Perhaps it is the story of Anthropology's subject communities throughout those parts of the world that were formerly colonised.

Recognised as 'Aborigines' in Australia, as Maori in New Zealand, as 'First Nations' in Canada, as 'Indigenous' in the United States, as 'Janajatis' in India, or as 'tribes' in Anthropology, as 'Notified Communities' in the administrative parlance of many countries, as 'Indigenous People' in the discourse of Human Rights, and as 'Adivasis' in the terminology of Asian activists, these variously described communities are far too numerous and dispersed in geographical locations to admit of any single inclusive description. It would be simplistic to perceive them as divergent victim groups of any shared epochal phenomenon such as colonialism, imperialism, modernity or globalisation. In their ethnic, cultural and linguistic attributes, they are so varied that it is almost impossible to speak of them as a common category of humanity. No single term can describe them with any degree of semantic assuredness. Even if one were to accept one or another term for the purpose, its normative frame may run up against numerous contradictions with the strikingly

divergent history of every community. Though such descriptive sociological terms often tend to perform a degree of communicational theatre, a scrutiny of the range of signification that the term is expected to cover reminds one that most discursive concepts are perennially contestable.

Given these difficulties, the United Nations working group established in 1982 for determining the communities that can be described as indigenous came up with a four fold criteria: a) 'pre-existent' peoples; b) 'marginalised and dominated' peoples; c) 'minority or culturally different' peoples; and d) peoples who identify themselves as indigenous. Since each of these criteria had spaces within them for contestation, the 'Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' (September 2007) was passed by the UN, but not unanimously. (Countries that voted against the Resolution included Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada.)

Notwithstanding these semantic difficulties, the existential pathos of the peoples whether identified from outside, or through self-identification as 'marginalised, minority, indigenous', has common features in all continents. The indigenous have been facing deprivation and dispossession of their natural resource base, denial of access to quality education, healthcare and other citizenship rights, and have come to be seen as 'a problem for the development project of modernity.' In the words of sociologist Shiv Visvanathan:

Four positions, four meditations on the problematic of the *Other* especially as tribal, have been particularly significant and profound. As a rule of thumb they can be classified as the Rousseauist reflection, the Romantic reaction with its own sense of irony, the ethical pragmatist philosophy and the developmentalist position. The last is an abdication of anthropology which argues that the tribe can survive only by becoming the Other. It is an inversion which not only destroys difference but is banally genocidal (Visvanathan 2008: 4).

The history of the 'other communities' during the last few centuries is filled with stories of forced displacement, land alienation, increasing

marginalisation, the eruption of violence and counter-violence by the nation-state. Going by any parameters of development, these communities always figure at the tail end. The situation of the communities that have been pastoral or nomadic has been even worse. Considering the immense odds against which these communities have had to survive, it is not short of a miracle that they have preserved their languages and continue to contribute to the astonishing linguistic diversity of the world. However, if the situation persists, the existence, memory and the languages of the marginalized face the risk of extinction. Aphasia, a loss of speech, seems to be their fate.

Either the silence of the indigenous, imposed on them as aphasia or internalised by them as a profound disapproval of modernity and the modern nation-state, or the 'voice' of the indigenous invariably mistaken as insurgency in every part of the world call for a revaluation of the path that the nations and societies across the globe have chalked out for reaching the by now accepted common goal of a new world order. Moreover, the traditional wisdom of these communities, their understanding of managing lives within reasonable limits of resources, their respect for environment and the natural resources can provide for the rest of the country a model of sustainable development. Similarly, the way to end the unrest among these communities is not through demonstrating the might of the state, but through developing a genuine mutual respect and understanding. Therefore, all these issues need to be seen as deeply interconnected.

The colonial construction of the communities was based on the very same social and philosophical perspective which went directly into the making of various fields of knowledge. Unfortunately, most of our intellectual capital in the post-colonial societies is deeply mired in the same tradition of knowledge. So long as we do not undertake a rigorous process of questioning the very basis of the fields of social sciences and humanities valorised by us, the situation of the indigenous and the nomads is little likely to change. Policy initiatives can begin the process of their empowerment, but merely

that can never complete the process unless the 'understanding' composed through the colonial intent is finally deconstructed. In that direction, Indigenous Studies need not be seen as an antagonist of Anthropology, but rather as a successor called upon to lay bare the history of formulation of the imagery of the indigenous.

NOTES:

1. My comments on Elwin draw upon my 'Introduction' to Selected Works of Elwin in *The Oxford Indian Verrier Elwin*, 2009. Further, my comment on the term 'indigenous' draws upon my 'Introduction' to *Indigeniety: Culture and Representation*, co-edited with Geoffrey Davis and K.K. Chakravarty, 2008.
2. All quotations from the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 are drawn from the unpublished report by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (1906) appointed by the Ministry of Social Justice, Government of India. The author was the Chairperson of TAG and the author of the TAG report.
3. The population of Denotified and Nomadic Tribes can only be estimated on the basis of the basis of the 1931 Census which was the last census to have clearly enumerated all nomadic and semi-nomadic communities in India. The estimate of 60 million is based on the field research done by the DNT Rights Action Group from 1998 to 2007 culminating in the drafting of the TAG Report. The government of India has taken the TAG recommendation to carry out a DNT Census and modified the Census 2011 exercise to include community-wise enumeration of the DNTs.
4. Shankar Guha-Niyogi was a social activist and leader of a labour union that he founded in Chhattisgarh and with which he worked till his assassination in 1991. Mahasweta Devi is probably the best known Indian author and is treated by the indigenous communities as their inspiring leader.

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Nandini Bhattacharya

REVISTING *SNEHALATA*: THE ARRIVAL AND GENDERING OF THE NOVEL IN COLONIAL BENGAL

Novelizing *Snehalata* (1914)

I revisit that foundational moment a hundred years ago when a spectacular act of gender-violence compelled the inhabitants of colonial Bengal to consider not just that act but its implicatedness in questions of colonial modernity; newly evolving marriage conventions; volatile gender-equations; and anti-colonial resistance. While such considerations were predictable, given the horrific nature of the act, what was not quite so predictable was the consideration of that act's implicatedness in terms of genres; the regarding of the act as caused by; as systemically embedded within; and 'participating'¹ within a generic type.

It is the second category of consideration that allows me the necessary point of entry into a complex genological² debate regarding the acculturation, and gendering of narrative generic types in colonial Bengal at the turn of the century.

I take my cue from a comment made by Rebatikanta Bandopadhyaya in the *Pratham Adhyaya* (first chapter) of his biographical work — *Snehalata* (1914) — recording the life-history of a certain fourteen year old Bengali Brahmin girl, *Snehalata Mukhopadhyaya*³.

Bartaman samay sadharan bangali grihasthya meyer jibane choudho batsarer madhye eman kono ghatana ki charitrer ghat pratighat sanghathan hoa- sambhabpar nahe, jahate tahar sansarik jibaner ghatana guli layiya "Chandrashekhar" ki "Sitaramer" mato ekkhani upanyas srishti hoite pare. Sei rup upanyas srishti kora amader ei granther uddeshya noe (Bandopadhyaya, in Maleka Begum eds. *Snehalata*, 21).

[there is nothing so eventful or dramatic in the life and character of a fourteen-year old ordinary, homely girl that enables one to construct a novel like *Chandrashekhar* or *Sitaram* from of its ingredients. Also, such is also not the intention of this book. *tr. and emphases, mine*].

According to Rebatikanta, a close family friend, *Snehalata* immolated herself a hundred years ago in January 1914 on her residential terrace in North Calcutta, in an attempt to rescue her father Harendralal Mukhopadhyaya from impending financial ruin/or social disgrace that would ensue if he succeeded/or failed in paying up the stiff amount of 2000 rupees in cash as promised *barpan* (groom-price or dowry) to *Snehalata*'s prospective spouse (over and above the *dan-samagri* that is, the gold ornaments, clothes, etc). *Snehalata*'s death on an empty terrace at midday, dousing the white sari she wore in kerosene, and setting fire to the same; after she had completed her housework and besmeared her feet with red *alta*; sent shock waves through the rank and file of Bengali *bhadralok*. The tragic event spawned a range of responses from the literary (poetic and narrational) to the polemical; articulating (and directing) indignant horror; deepest sympathies; and visceral anger directed at the inhuman system of dowry. These responses particularly deliberated on the complex and intertwined categories of marriage and colonial modernity⁴. Contemporary ideologues saw in the valorization/ monetization of English education, the creation of a class who could afford the same; get into government service, and inscribe a new kind of respectability, or *bhadraloki* thereby⁵. The demand for a stiff *barpan* as 'price'/'value' for that hankered *bhadrata*, resulted in the further marginalization of women within an economy that was already 'hirsute' and growing 'moustaches'⁶. The burning maiden-*Snehalata* — became a national icon of female courage, purity and self-sacrificing intent, comparable to the *jauhar*-undertaking *satis* of pre-modern Rajasthan, and the focal point of a nation-wide anti-dowry campaign⁷, that was in effect, an anti-imperial resistance directed against the colonial education system and ensuing deracination/ misogyny of the Bengali *bhadralok*⁸.

The Snehalata incident (supposedly) informed a number of Rabindranath Tagore's short stories written in 1914 and imbued them with feminist intent preeminent among those being *Streer Patra* or "The Wife's Letter." Sumit Sarkar in "*Ghare Baire* in its Times" and Tanika Sarkar in "Many faces of Love: Country, Woman and God in *The Home and the World*" point to Rabindranath's critical engagement with the woman's voice, in and around 1914-15 and its expression in a cluster of proto-feminist short stories published in *Sabuj Patra*⁹. They also note that this voice is textually constituted through the deployment of *chalitbhasha* in his short stories and novels, and through a self-reflexive look at *écriture feminine* as constitutive of female subjectivity¹⁰.

While overwhelming sympathy for Snehalata and revulsion directed towards the cultural practice of extorting *barpan* from the hapless girls' fathers were predominant 'feelings,' there was also a countervailing discourse of indignant pique that 'read' this act of self-immolation, as deliberately spectacular, novelistic, melodramatic, attention-seeking and feminine in a deracinated way. It is the 'fashionable' *nabinas* (new women) who read novels; were influenced by the *bibis* or anglicized ways of Western women; and out of sync with the patient hardy ways of *prachinas* (traditional woman) of our country who behaved in such an overwrought, attention-seeking manner and what is more, corrupted other impressionable young women by their example. That Snehalata's suicide was followed by two other young girls Charushila and Nibhanani, taking their lives in a similar fashion, was a case in point. A popular balladeer Gobinda Chandra Das demonizes such acts as 'novelistic', and indicts the texts (especially novels) of both Rabindranath and Bankimchandra as informing such acts.

What a terrible moment it was when you lifted that bottle of kerosene/it rendered Bengal into a desert for women/ [...] you had none of that older resilience and toleration/ that mercy kindness sympathy/which are a woman's most precious qualities/you had no respect for religion or *bratas*/why you are a modern Saraswati - for whom the harmonium is the

only religion!/a luxury loving zero-tolerance beauty that's you/wearing *dilkhosh* and *kuntalin*/you faint at the sight of hard work[...]the cuckoo reminds you of Rabi and Girish Ghosh songs/ and you imagine you are a Saibalini, a Kunda or a Kamal flower/or perhaps a Rohini or a Bhramar promenading by the pond/whose heart is burnished by the novels she reads [...] (Das, *Snehalata, Nabyabharat*, Bhadra 1321, Aug-September, 1915, ctd and tr. Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity*, 2006,)¹¹

Rebatikanta Bandopadhyaya, her first biographer is obviously sensitive to such criticism and at pains to emphasize that there is nothing in Snehalata's life that is 'novelistic' or can serve as ingredients of 'novels' such as *Chandrashekhar* or *Sitaram*. What fascinates me at this point is not Rebatikanta's difference with his critics regarding the 'charge' of Snehalata's act but the similarity in so far as both parties (for and against Snehalata) code the novel-genre and gender it thereby. Both parties agree that this new narrative mode is culturally coded as spectacle-specific; feeling-centric (as opposed to reason-centric), sentimental, insubstantial, untrustworthy and typically 'feminine'. While Rebatikanta wishes to distance Snehalata's act from a 'novelistic' one and thereby prove her genuineness, her critics point towards the similarities between that spectacular act of setting fire to one's white sari on an empty terrace with novelistic structures of heightened, melodramatic action, and overwrought characterization. In forging similarities between 'novelistic action' and Snehalata's 'act' they are able to suitably condemn the latter as attention-seeking; over-excited; culturally inauthentic and therefore, iconically untrustworthy.

Arrival and gendering of the novel genre in 18th-19th century England

Evaluating the gendering of the novel genre in colonial Bengal necessitates a looking back to the originary site (so far as the Indian colonized subject was concerned in terms of generic dissemination) of the novel form in late 18th-early 19th century England. One couldn't agree more with K. K. Ruthven's observation that,

novels developed as a 'low' form in the eighteenth century, and were not only easier to read than poetry, but also suspiciously easy to write. [...] To think of the woman as having a special aptitude for writing novels was therefore, something of a backhanded compliment, given the low status of a product [...] and therefore as something to be taken no more seriously than women themselves (92).

Ruthven warns that given that the "connection between gender and genre" are "posed in such condescending terms" there is a need to express "spirited protests [...]" (93). This condescension-laced 'connection' is something that English women novelists were forced to come to terms with in their distinctive ways. Their resistance to (the trivializing of the both the novel genre, and its woman practitioner) and reclamation of generic space (constitutive of writing as well as reading practices) is one of the most important theoretical interventions of the narrative in the 19th century England. I hope the following examples will compel contemporary scholars to consider questions of genres not just in terms of prefabricated and hierarchized taxonomies, ready-made for inscriptive-use but as being continually produced by 'readerly' expectations.

There is the self-deprecating narrator in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1803) who at one stroke voices allegations of triviality/femininity associated with the novel, and novel-reading women in her 'depiction' of Catherine Morland - the novel-reading heroine, and by so 'voicing' reclaims as meaningful, the peculiarly 'gendered' writing-reading practice of the novel form. The narrator bemoans that "while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the history of England, or the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens" as they are seen as masculine (and worthwhile) generic interventions, "there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of a novelist" (especially when a woman writes it), and "of slighting the performances which only have genius, wit and taste to recommend them" The narrator goes on to dramatize the gendering

(and demeaning thereby) of the novel-writing and reading act in early 19th century England. The young, Mr. Thorpe makes a clearly gendered point (and demarcation) when he trashes novels as a genre ("novels are so full of nonsense and stuff") and declares he has never read any except "a tolerably decent one" such as "*Tom Jones*" (that is, needless to say by a male author, *NA*, ch 5. 29).

However, it is only a few pages earlier, that the narrator (gazing fondly at the two female novel-readers, Catherine and Isabella) declares that it is in these (culturally denigrated) novels (written and read by and entitled as) the "Cecilia or Camilla or Belinda" that "the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language." (*NA*, Ch 5, 21).

This narrational intervention where Austen claims within the novel-as-a-genre's patriarchal parameters (note that Sterne has been mentioned) an agency-imbued gendered space, purging the genre of the cultural reproof of triviality and unreality, is a much celebrated one¹². Austen's redemption and reclamation of a positive space for women writing and reading the novel, however, is achieved in a more fundamental manner, in *Northanger Abbey*. The narrator encourages the 'blind' reader to be deluded by Catherine Morland's 'heroic' pretensions (note how many times the word 'heroine' is used in the first five chapters!) and fooled into believing that this novel (that is *Northanger Abbey*) also possess a silly, overwrought, 'feminine' narrational trajectory. At the end of it though, the 'enlightened' reader is thoroughly discomfited by the mundane, (and to an extent, sordid) nature of its narrational closure. This subversion of 'condescension-as-reader response- associated- with novels- written-by- and- about -woman,' is where the actual reclamation of gendered narrative space takes place.

A more tangential kind of reclamation comes from the pen of George Eliot - a woman-novelist, unequivocally acknowledged as 'masculine/serious/philosophical' in her novel-writing approach. Eliot (who, like many of her contemporaries; adopted a masculine inscriptive persona, keeping her female identity of Mary Ann Evans

under wraps) posits an oblique distinction between the serious and trivial practitioner of the novel form (and its readers) bemoaning the preponderance of silly novels by lady novelists for equally silly lady readers. She regrets that “there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements” (ctd Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies*, 93), and by emphasizing ‘absence’ reclaims the ‘presence’ of a different, more serious kind of novel-writing (and hopefully, reading-community).

From Brunetiere to Rabindranath: the novel in colonial Bengal

To speak of ‘gendering’ genres¹³ is to understand generic types as not transcendent, free-floating beings, or simple clear cut categories and conventions out there to be deployed by anybody setting out to write, but dynamic entities culturally and historically conditioned; or even not ‘entities’ but expectations that the reader/viewer imbues a cultural product with at a particular point of time. Such recognition (and shift from the Aristotelian position of hierarchized taxonomies) came to Europe fairly late, via 19th century European Romantic ideologues in general, and Hegelian aesthetics in particular. This new historicist understanding of genres was further leavened by the 19th century French literary critic Ferdinand Brunetiere (*The Evolution of Genres in the History of Literature*. 1890) who gave genre-scholarship a Darwinian evolutionary spin positing contiguities between organisms and literary types and explaining them in terms of birth, growth, maturation, survival (of the fittest), and extinction (of the unfit). It is a position that has been given a new currency by scholars such as David Fishelov who opine that, genres may become ‘sterile’ and obsolete in certain periods. Todorov’s idea of genres not dying out entirely but mutating and morphing into other genres in different times, participates in Brunetiere’s position.

The Russian Formalists developed Brunetiere’s idea further and considered evolution of genres not as isolated developments but in relation to a genre system as a whole within a particular historical/social period.

Mikhail Bakhtin is not very far from Ferdinand Brunetiere when he describes the novel in terms of an organism, a newly born, “whose generic skeleton is yet to harden” (*Dialogic Imagination*, 4). Significantly Bakhtin went on to code the novel form in a very different way, positing a critical difference between older, established, hardened and by implication, geriatric genres such as the ‘epic’ and the ‘tragedy’ with the unmade, unformed, eternally morphing, child-like form of the ‘novel’ where each position was implicated in its other. Bakhtin deploys the term ‘novelize’ to signify that newly-born; that refusing to grow up; laughter-infused, free-floating, polyphonic contra-form. How else could he tar with the same generic brush of the ‘novel’ the second century BC, Menippean satires of Appuleius; the 14th century French narratives of Rabelais; the sixteenth century English plays of William Shakespeare; and the twentieth century Russian prose narratives of Feodor Dostoevsky?

Also, given Bakhtin’s contra-Aristotelian; contra-Stalinist stance, the ‘novel’ could very well act as the site where genres are de-generized; where bonds of categories and types are loosened; and grim, official hierarchies scrambled.

Equally important for this study (considering that it takes as its focal point 19th century Bengali literature in general and Rabindranath’s theoretical interventions, in particular) is the position that German Romantics take up *vis a vis* generic forms in literature. While the neo-classical approaches to genre utilize a theoretical, transhistorical set of categories (or taxonomies) such as epic, lyric, dramatic, to classify literary texts according to internal thematic and formal relations, Romantic approaches to genre have insisted that literary texts achieve their status by exceeding generic conventions/expectations. Genre-conventions perceived as constraint is a line of thinking that may be traced back to Friedrich Schlegel (*Literary Notebooks 1797-1801*) who insisted on the singularity of literary texts, with romantic poetry serving as the ideal example: “only Romantic poetry is infinite as only it is free [...] the genre of Romantic poetry is the only one that is more than a genre” (qtd. Threadgold, 112). Genre scholar John Frow (*Genre*) is of the opinion

that that Derrida in perceiving genres to be constraints (albeit inevitable) on textual energy, and reminding that “every text participates in one or several genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging” (“The Law of Genre” 230) continues the Romantic position regarding genres¹⁴.

I would like to add that Rabindranath Tagore (as early as in 1895) in a poem entitled *Purnima* (anthologized in *Chitra*) is entirely ‘Romantic’ (in the German-European sense) in his resistance to categorization (and constraining thereby) of literary works and their *auteurs* at the behest of literary scholars. Responding to Edward Dowden’s *New Studies in Literature* (a book he had read in 1895 and recorded in his *Chinnapatra*), Tagore notes that he is befuddled by *panditer lekha* (works of scholars) and their categorization and confining (*kar kon shreni*) of *kavis* (poets or artists) such as “Shelley, Goethe, Coleridge” and their *kavityakala* (the artist’s artistry, aesthetics). The scholarly book regarding generic classification finally gives him a headache (*tapiya uthilo shir, shranta holo man*) and he arrives at the conclusion that these are all lies (*mone holo shob mithya*) fabricated by *lipibaniks* (dealing in commerce of words).

Culture study scholars, and comparatists such as Amiya Dev note that, “the business of genres was not probably of only being there and not being there but also being in tune with cultures where they were located. And culture by no means is a monosemic organization” (Dev, *Genology*, 147). May I add that the business of genres is not merely about growth or death but about travels to distant lands, about relocation, and re-culturation. When genres such as the novel and the short story move to disparate locations like nineteenth-century Bengal astride the colonial endeavour, they mutate in strange ways just as the gendered assumptions associated with them refract and transmogrify at the thresholds of cultural contact.

The English novel arrived as the civilizing instrument of the colonizer, and assumed canonicity to a considerable extent by the virtue of it being perceived as emanating from within the ruling culture¹⁵. While in real terms the flourishing of the novel genre in the culturally disparate colonial Bengal was a complex process

of recasting and remaking of itself in relation to available, indigenous narrative structures as well as the theoretical assumptions underpinning them,¹⁶ the perceptions of the novel-genre’s ‘masculine’ canonicity, and implicatedness within power structures was overwhelming, so far as the colonial subject was concerned¹⁷. Feminist genre-scholars point out that literary canons commonly favour those genres which are historical products of patriarchy. If we consider colonial structures and patriarchy as contiguous then it would be safe to conclude that the novel was canonized just as it was masculinised in 19th century Bengal.

In the hands of someone as intellectual, conventionally successful, and partaking in colonial modernity with breath-taking ease as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya the novel genre assumed the kind of canonicity it had perhaps never enjoyed in Bengal. And none were more taken up by its charms as the cultured Tagores of Jorasanko. In fact if one is to believe the anonymous essayist of “*Banglaye Upanyas Lekhak*” (the novel writer in Bengal) anthologized in the Haridas Bandopadhyaya edited journal *Kalpana* (1887), the novel genre was of pure European origin and Bankimchandra its finest artist! The essayist informs that though the novel-genre had enjoyed merely twenty-five years of existence in Bengal and could be described as a mere child, yet in the last decade of the nineteenth century it had turned out to be the most popular form of writing:

Ekhan upanyaser srote Bangla tolpar.[...] Ekhan ei upanyaser srote mudranjantra chalita; pustakbikreta palita, kretrigan prabhavita, Banglar jubak-jubati shikhitra ebang samalochak badai byatibyastha (ctd Bhadra, 237).

[Now Bengal is simply overwhelmed by the tidal waves of the novel; it is the tidal wave that fuels the printing presses, gives book sellers their living; fascinates the readers, and keeps the Bengali intelligentsia and the critics on their toes].

While the Tagores could and did make tongue-in-cheek comments regarding the genre’s feminine-unreliability, the preeminent among them had, not so long ago, celebrated the genre and granted it

canonicity not so much in terms of gender, as in terms of evolutionary fitness. Rejoicing the coming of Bankimbabu's novels in a serialized form in the journal *Bangadarshan*, Rabindranath Tagore asserts that such an arrival was regal in its dimensions, and wiped out at one stroke the primitive childishness; atavistic cultural immaturity; inauthenticity and crude indecency of *afsanas* and romances: "*Kothae gelo sei Bijaybasanta, sei Golebakaoli, sei sab balak-bhulano katha?*" (Where did those childish tales, such as Bijaybasanta and Golebakaoli simply vanish?) Rabindranath asserts that, without Bankimchandra and the novel, the Bengalis (and by association the Indian nation) would have remained in the first second or third standards or just been promoted to the fourth fifth or sixth. But Bengali literature would have never assumed adulthood:

Amra eto din shishupath granther prathamabag, dwityiobhag, tritiyabag shesh kariya barajor chaturtha, pancham, shashtha bhage giya upanita haitam. Kintu Banga sahitya bayoprapti hoitona. (Tagore, "Bankimchandra" *Adhunika Sahitya*, RR 9, 554).

In "*Bangla Sahityer Kramabikash*" (Evolution of Bengali Literature) Rabindranath assumes a similar Darwinian position describing the coming of Bankimchandra and the novel form, with the coming of the fitter genre so that modernity in literature could no longer be held back "*sahitye adhunikatar abirbhab ke ar thekano gelona*" (The arrival of modernity in literature could no longer be held back, "*Sahityarup*" *Sahityer Pathe*, RR, 21, 494).

Rabindranath owes this Darwinian (and gendered) analogy to novelist-ideologue Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-1894) himself. In Bankimchandra's English essay "A Popular Literature for Bengal" the progenitor of the novel and 'respectable' genres in colonial India clears the generic 'trash' in his own backyard in condemning Jayadeva's poetic eulogies to the god Krishna (*Gitagobinda*) and Bharatchandra's romance *Bidya Sundar* as womanly :—

[...] from the beginning to the end it does not contain a single expression of manly feeling — of womanly feeling there is a

great deal", and as informing "a sensual and effeminate race" (98) whose "indolent habits and a feeble-moral organization gave birth to an effeminate poetical literature" (*Bankimrachanavali*, vol iii, 99)

Bankim, gives the generic question a racial-nationalist spin, as he hails the arrival of respectable genres in terms of adulthood, and masculinification of the Indian/Bengali *jati*:

And so the Bengali stood, crushed and spiritless [...] till a new light dawned on him, [...] And with this new dawn of life came into the country one of the mightiest instruments of civilization, the printing press. Gradually the change set in, and a demand began to be made for a literature of another character than that of the *Gitagobinda* school (99)

Strangely, even as the novel in Bengal assumed the 'high' cultural status and 'male' texture given its proximity to the dominant culture, it continued to carry forward the Victorian cultural stigmata of its contra-erudite, feeling-centric, feminine/unreliable essence. In 1877, the novel-reading heroine Hemangini in the Jyotirindranath Tagore inscribed Bengali farce *Emon Karmo ar Korbo Na* (later renamed as *Aleekbabu* and published in 1900) defends Aleek babu as not someone who tells untruths but as one who presents events in an imaginative/heightened manner. Significantly, though Aleek means 'unreal'; in the context of Jyotirindranath's play, the word is made to carry the semantic charge of 'lies'/'untruth'¹⁸. So Aleek babu literally means the 'gentleman who lies.' Fascinated by the novel form, the heroine Hemangini discovers contiguities between Aleek babu's lying tendencies, and his novel-reading habits. Speaking to her female servant Prasanna or Pishni (as she is endearingly called) about Aleek babu, Hemangini asserts:

Aleekbabu, ar sakal rakam lok bhalo, kebal dosher madhye bhuleo tar mukh die ekti satyakatha beroena, kintu bastabik ta noe. Tini ektu shajiye gujiye katha bolen ar loke mone kore mithye katha. [...] Amar bodh hoe tini onek novel parechen. Novel ki ta janish? Novel bole ekrakamer boi

berieche — tate jemon gyaner katha thake eman ar kichute na. Age Ramayan Mahabharat parte ki bhaloi lagto, kintu novel porte shikhe abadhi segulo ar chunte icche korena.

[Aleek babu is good in all respects except that not a single word of truth escapes his lips. However, that is not how things are. He loves to speak in a heightened, ornamental manner, and people feel that he is telling lies. I believe he has read many ‘novels’. Do you know what a ‘novel’ means? It is a new sort of book with all sorts of information that is out in the market. I don’t even feel like touching the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which I had loved reading earlier on, now that the ‘novel’ is here. *Aleekbabu*, 11].

Hemangini effectively posits commonalities between the ‘novel’, artifice, untrustworthy charm, and flighty femininity. In pointing out the critical difference between the novel’s inflated, unnatural, feeling-centric language and its effete charms that may be ‘read’ in print; and the plainly told, tedious ‘truths’ of the *dharmashastras*, accessible orally to the indigenous maid servant Pishni via the *kathakthakur* (as well as Hemangini in her premodern avatar); Jyotirindranath is surely not so much locating the novel-genre within an effeminate, deracinated cultural domain, as he is playing up to the gallery, to arouse laughter and tickle nationalist sentiments.

Such associations between the ‘novel’ and the flighty woman abound in 19th century Bangla literature. However, what must be noted is that while the novel-reading woman and the Bangla novel is designated a ‘low’ position, the novel-form itself and its English avatar is still considered worthy of respect, in the colonial margins.

One of the more interesting examples is an anonymous and undated Bangla farce, printed in the popular North Calcutta presses (commonly referred to as Battala). Named *Novel-Nayika ba Shikkhita Bou* (the Novel-Heroine or the Educated Wife) the play has, at its centre, the novel-obsessed heroine (*nayika*) Rukmini. She is peculiarly reminiscent of Catherine Morland in her novel-reading mania and her overwrought, heroine-like, self-fashioning on novelistic predicates. Rukmini’s ‘novelized’ engagement with the world precipitates a

conjugal (and by association, societal) crisis. While the novel-genre is condemned in no uncertain terms by ‘sensible’ women (belonging to the unlettered lower classes) and the ‘sensible’ hard-working men (that include neglected husbands) as insubstantial, and transgressive (in conjugal and communitarian terms), even Rukmini’s closest female associates such as Sarada (and who form the core of a transgressive reading group) condemn Bangla novels as generically inauthentic, as mere mindless ‘translations’ of English situations and characters! (*Novel-Nayika* 718-19) The difference posited between the authentic, idea-centric (and masculine) English novel and the ‘translated’ (in the pejorative sense of borrowed, mimicked), feminized Bangla ‘nobel’ is revealing. It is within the refractive indices, within the difference between the centre (imperializing Britain) perceiving the ‘novel’-genre as feminized, and the margins (colonial Bengal) perceiving the novel-reader (and the Bangla novel) as ‘translated’ derivative and feminized that the cultural complexities of generic transaction may be gauged.

Snehalata/Nirbhaya novelized/narrativized (2014)

The Snehalata debate in the second decade of the twentieth century is testimony to the complex cultural reasons that led to the perception of the novel form as masculine but the novel-reading woman as well as novels read by women (especially novels written in Bangla) as transgressive and pejoratively feminine! It is also testimony to how retooled associated with novel-reading and novels in Bengal is culturally mediated to serve the interests of a *bhadralok* class intent on nationalist self-fashioning. Rebatikanta in his biography insists that, while alive, Snehalata never received English education, which (paradoxically) her brothers did; as did her husband-to-be and for which such a groom was considered ‘valuable’ in the marriage market! Rebatikanta glories in awareness that Snehalata could not read English; could only read the Bangla *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*; other holy texts and had *no fascination for plays or novels*—” *Natak, novelar dike taar adou jhonk chilona*” (Bandopadhyaya, 22). This forging of contiguity between English education and the novel form

was a much employed strategy to inscribe the nationally-conscious gender positions. Ironically, as early as in the 1890s, Nabinchandra Sen (1847-1909)¹⁹ in a conversation with Bankimchandra, condemns the latter's novels as "*Bilati piriter pindapindanta*" (a terrible hash of European romances) and accuses the novelist of fanning the Bengali woman's suicidal, and hyperemotional proclivities:-

*Chhai bashma naranarir premer ugra chabi ankia apni
Bangadesher ardhek narir atmahatyar dai hoitechen* (Sen, 1959: pp?)

(You become responsible for the suicidal tendencies of great many women in Bengal by drawing crude, unreal, trashy pictures of romance in your narratives,]²⁰.

As a corrective, Nabinchandra recommended the discarding of the novel-genre altogether, and the espousing of history-writing as a rationality and nationalistic-feeling informing project. Life comes to a full circle when that very Bankimchandra who had initiated the novel-genre as a corrective to indigenous narratives (condemned as prenovelistic, and 'womanly' in their non-rational essence!) is now accused of novelistically informing female (and womanly) suicides²¹!

One looks back at the burning maiden Snehalata a hundred years later (and at a time when the centrality and national valence of a raped-tortured-to-death 'Nirbhaya' of New Delhi, is being produced by the electronic-media informed narratives) to discover (all over again) how the nation narrativizes itself engaging with that perfectly 'novelized' subject.

NOTES:

1. I use the term 'participation' in the Derridean sense (as outlined in his French essay translated in English as "The Law of Genre")- sense; as taking part in complex and dynamic ways.
2. 'Genology' or the study of genres was a term coined by the French comparatist van Tighiem. It is rarely used now and has

- been largely replaced by the more transparent term-'genre-studies.' Genre (derived from latin *genus* or type has been defined as a "set of highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning" (Frow, 10)
3. Rebatikanta's biography is considered definitive as it is the first; and Rebatikanta recognized as a family friend who knew Snehalata from close quarters.
 4. Refer to Maleka Begum edited *Snehalata*, (2006) for a range of responses poetical and polemical. Also refer to Raibhadur Chunilal Bose's essay "Marriage Dowry" that posits a critical difference between pre-colonial times, when the demand [for dowry] was usually moderate and the practice confined to a small section of the community; "the expenses on education were trifling; and most people remained satisfied with simple food, simple clothes" (141), and the modern times where a clerk in a government office, earning not more than fifty rupees monthly "must have a graduate, or at least a college student as his son-in-law, even if the young man has to depend upon his relations and friends for help to defray the expenses of his education" and that "respectability now consists either in being a government servant or belonging to one of the learned professions, and as university degrees are the passports to them, undue importance is naturally attached to these degrees" (142).
 5. Refer to Tithi Bhattacharya's *Sentinels of Culture* for ways in which colonial and English education became the marker of and constituting Bengali *bhdarata* and *bhadraloki*.
 6. Refer to Veena Talwar Olenburg's *Dowry Murder* for an engaging discussion on the masculinization of the economy under colonial rule, in Northern India and the collusion of the Utilitarian, misogynistic colonial government in marginalizing women even further and raising groom price in the marriage market.
 7. Refer to Narasimha Rao's treatise *Snehalata* coming from a location as distant, as Madras, to understand the impact of the act of immolation.
 8. The more celebrated of such responses — forging connections between modern/colonial education; the commodification of human relations; and the bestial greed of deracinated *babus* is penned by the popular balladeer Gobindachandra Das. His song/poem

- is entitled “*Kanyadayagrashthya Pitar Prati Bibahajogya Balikar Ukti*” (The Marriageable Daughter’s Words to her Father).
9. Tanika Sarkar notes: “It was this new presence of women’s writing in the public sphere that enabled Tagore to develop a fresh expressive form at this time. With *Streer Patra* in 1914, he began to use the persona of a female narrator or writer who writes her own life in first person within his narrative” (“Country, Woman, and God in *Home and the World*”, 31). Sumit Sarkar writes: “This critical attitude to Hindu nationalist notions of femininity deepened between 1914 and 1917 in a spate of short stories, published [...] in *Sabuj Patra*, itself an experimental, in some ways deeply iconoclastic monthly [...] *Streer Patra* and *Ghare Baire* were the first works of Tagore written in the *chalit* (colloquial) Bengali prose. As contrasted with the prevalent, more Sanskritized *sadhu bhasha*, this must have been intended as a democratising move” (*Ghare Baire in its Times*, 146).
 10. The journal *Sabujpatra* or green leaves, launched significantly in 1914 on the poet’s birthday 25th Baisakh by Pramathanath Chaudhuri (husband of Rabindranath’s niece Indira Debi Chaudhurani) was informed with the expressed intent of freeing the self from the tyranny of social conformity. That seven of the ten short stories Tagore had inscribed in *Sabujpatra* are narrated in the first person is testimony to how Rabindranath uses the short story to trace the emancipation of the fictional self from societal shackles, and the narrative genre from its expressed duty of providing a sequential plot.
 11. For a quick recapitulation of discursive structures that posit binaries between the hardy, patient indigenous Indian women and the new-fangled, fragile, emotionally unstable, bred-on novels, new women-refer to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s classic essay *Prachina O Nabina* in his *Bibidha Prabandha*.
 12. Refer to Supriya Chaudhuri’s essay “Understanding Genre” in Dasgupta eds. *Literary Studies in India: Genology*, 2004.
 13. Genre and gender have similar etymological roots (genus) and both refer to ‘generating’, ‘creating’, while signifying the idea of a ‘type’ or ‘class.’
 14. Even today one uses terms- ‘genre-fiction’, or ‘genre-movie’ to indicate an unimaginative; repetitive, and formulaic piece of work.

15. This is not to state that within England, the gender-coding of the novel-genre remained a constant. The cultural assumptions of triviality, untrustworthiness, femininity associated with the novel in its early days changed by the middle of the nineteenth century as the novel assumed cultural centrality and became the voice of the respectable Victorian middle class. In the hands of an erudite, philosophical George Eliot, or a socially-conscious Charles Dickens who had made a successful profession out of novel-writing, the genre assumed a seriousness of purpose; masculine gravity and canonicity thereby.
16. Refer to Subha Chakravarty Dasgupta’s essay entitled “Structural Forces in the Emergence of a Genre: the Novel in Bengal (JJCL, 29, 1990-91, 45-54).
17. Refer to Meenakshi Mukherjee’s *Twice Born Fiction* and Priya Joshi’s *In Another Country* for more on this.
18. Additional knowledge that Rabindranath himself played the part of Aleekbabu in Jyotirindranath’s play adds to the fun quotient.
19. Nabinchandra Sen, Bankim’s younger contemporary made a name for himself writing Bangla epic poetry on the three phases of Krishna’s life-*Kurukshetra*, *Raibatak*, and *Prabhas*.
20. Critical lore has it that Bankim deeply regretted inscribing the episode of Kundanandini’s suicide by poison-consumption, in his novel *Bishabriksha (The Poison Tree)*. Amitrasudan Bhattacharya quotes Bankim without citing sources:- “[...] in delineating Kundanandini as consuming poison, I have paved the path for women committing suicide by taking poison. The first to follow such an instance has been my daughter.” (“Srishti O Samaya: Rabindranath–Bankimchandra”, Kolkata: *Korok Sahitya Patrika: Bishesh Bankim Sankhya*, 37, tr. Mine). Amitrasudan also feels that Kadambini (Kadambari) Rabindranath’s sister-in-law (brother Jyotirindranath’s wife) might have been motivated by Bankim’s *Bishabriksha* into committing suicide.(37)
21. Ironically, Bankim’s name becomes synonymous with the hyperemotive novel reading woman. A Bangla farce by Durgadas De *Miss Bino Bibi B.A.* (1898) has a novel reading heroine called Bankim Biharini (or Bino bibi) who wants to commit suicide if she cannot marry for love and become a heroine! (547)

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Ananya Dutta Gupta

THE TOPSY-TURVY WORLD OF TAGORE'S *SHEY*

I

This essay attempts to unravel the ideology, the language and the design of Tagore's *Shey*, and the larger cultural purpose embedded in its specific aesthetics. A few disclaimers would not be out of place. My essay may give the impression of dehistoricising *Shey*, written in 1937. For I do not set out to locate it within either the entirety of Tagore's writings or an existing tradition of writing that Tagore may well have drawn upon. However, such issues deserve a full-length monograph. I am aware of Sudipta Kaviraj's stimulating essay (2000, 379-406) on the cultural history of laughter in colonial Bengali literature. Although Kaviraj does not treat of *Shey*, I implicitly see Dadamoshai and *Shey* as products of the self-irony that Kaviraj detects elsewhere in Tagore. To the extent that my essay juxtaposes *Shey* with other stray writings of Tagore's, I have compared them in terms of internally revealed parity or disparity in subject, ideology and authorial posturing rather than chronological proximity. I would like this essay to be read as a self-conscious experiment in reading a critically neglected Tagore text in the light of a handful of imaginative and theoretical writings that are European but nonetheless pertinent. To that end, it makes consciously heavy use of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the Rabelaisian novel and also offers certain independent comparisons between *Shey* and an Elizabethan English text in terms of literary aesthetics and cultural politics.

Shey as a text transcends and critiques the stereotype of heroic male action as a legitimate object of child fantasy which the poem

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'Birpurush' in *Sishu* (Tagore 2007, 61) promotes. 'Birpurush' corresponds to Bakhtin's (1981, 16) definition of the epic as an essentially static, formulaic, monologic mode of writing that espouses, propagates and perpetuates a set of traditional communal values. These values essentialise virile masculinity in terms of a readiness to engage in violence, organised or stray, and reduce the woman – wife, beloved, or mother – to the role of a passively appreciative spectator of such exhibitionism of male brute force. To quote from Sukanta Chaudhuri's English translation of the poem, aptly titled 'The Hero' (Tagore 2002, 44):

Then, just as to yourself you've said
'In such a fight, my Khoka must be dead!'
I'd ride up, dripping blood and sweat,
Calling 'The fight's at end!' And when we've met,
Down from the palanquin you'd step
And kiss and draw me to your lap.
'How lucky Khoka was here,' you'd say,
'Else I'd have been in dread!'

The child-icon of Birpurush, therefore, is not the child-icon of *Shey*. Tagore's writings for children may not be clubbed together under any one ideological rubric. As a body of writing, they make for a tantalisingly ambiguous dialogical payoff of conservative and radical, hegemonic and dissident, cultural values. Sukumar in *Shey* is the counterpart of 'Birpurush' in *Sishu*. Dadamoshai recounts what transpired during a visit to Sukumar's

He threw up his head and announced, 'I'm a prince!'
'Where's your sword?'

'A broken stick from a half-burnt firework had been lying on their terrace ever since the night of Diwali. He had tied it to his waist with a ribbon, and now displayed it to me.'

I said, 'A sword indeed! But you must have a horse as well!'

He answered, 'It's in the stables.' ... (Tagore 2007, 103-4)

But Pupe's rejection of the boy-hero-aspirant in favour of the fantastically grotesque Ghantakarna – Bell-Ear – renders Sukumar's

heroic fantasy abortive (Tagore 2007, 109). Indeed, the text's gender politics behind privileging Pupe over Sukumar, comparable with *Raktakarabi*'s privileging of Nandini over Ranjan, may well be related to Shey's liberal progressive as opposed to reactionary principle of femininity. One might contrast it with the essentialist dichotomisation in *Shesher Kobita* of man and woman's burdens in history as creation and preservation respectively:

The race of woman is pure and fluid; not rigid, but lively and vivacious, even setting other things into motion. When the earth was being assembled, the ocean came first. The women floated about on its waters, mounted on cormorants (Tagore 2007, 118).

Shey is the testament of a world-weary and word-weary adult (Tagore 2007, 16) breathing his lost primal, spontaneous, childlike self into his doppelgänger, Shey. He fashions Shey as an intermediary between himself in his imagined ineffectuality and the child-woman Pupe, who is his granddaughter and soulmate in solitude. The text designates Pupe and not Sukumar as the sole intended receptacle of its constituent loosely strung body of magical realist stories. And Pupe owes this distinction not only to her tender age but also her intransigently "ordinary" mind. Dadamoshai reminds the reader that Pupe scores poorly in arithmetic, unlike Sukumar who conforms to the middle-class Bengali ideal of the "brilliant student" (Tagore 2007, 29, 102 & 109). Nevertheless, the putatively senile Dadamoshai is desperate to keep the not so brilliant though intellectually exacting, story-hungry mind of his granddaughter entertained. The text is doggedly "ordinary" and "humble" in its choice of locale, protagonists and action, and for this same reason privileges the "khyati-heen para" (Tagore 1988, IX: 673) – the inglorious neighbourhoods of old Kolkata's lanes and bylanes. As to the hallowed high streets of fame in the Calcutta of the *Raj* – the sprawling thoroughfares of Chowringhee – only the tiger goes there for a haircut (Tagore 2007, 54). A particularly scatological episode occurs when the incongruously "scholarly" Mohan Bagan goalkeeper Smritiratnamashai first

"swallows" goals and then licks the Ochterlony Monument that commemorates martyrs of war. He pointedly drops institutional names associated with the putative cultural glory of India under the Raj:

But far from satisfying his appetite, they made his stomach growl for more. He found himself in front of the Ochterlony Monument. He began by licking the bottom, but soon he had licked it up to its very tip. Badruddin Mian, cobbling shoes in the Senate Hall of the university, saw him and rushed out in horror.

'You're learned in the sacred books, and yet you contaminate this great monument with your spittle!' he scolded. 'Fie, fie!'

He then himself spat thrice upon the monument and hurried off to report the matter at the Statesman House (Tagore 2007, 44-6).

In this self-conscious foregrounding of what Bakhtin would call 'my time' over 'epic time', the mere cobbler Badruddin Mian assumes greater significance than the grand cultural edifice of the Senate Hall out of which he emerges, and he colludes in the symbolic devouring of that edifice when he spits upon it.

Bakhtin (1981, 20) writes how the novel, unlike the epic, "is associated with the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought [holiday forms, familiar speech, profanation]." One notes, in this connection, Tagore's deliberate use of Bengali diminutives such as "Udho", "Gobra", "Ponchu" and "Bheku" (Tagore 2007, 24-5) with their intended comic overtones. These are comparable to names like Feluda, Tenida, Ghonada, and even Bantul the Great or Nonte-Fonte conferred by later Bengali fiction-writers on their protagonists in order to underline their texts' inextirpable grounding in the lived, everyday reality of a mainstream Bengali urban milieu. Consistent with this feature, Shey addresses Dadamoshai as simply, 'Dada', the informal fraternal, quintessentially Bengali, salutation. It marks Tagore's ironic de-mythicising of his hallowed, valorised, epic identity as "Gurudev" or "Kabiguru". The

unselfconscious camaraderie with which Shey interacts with Dadamoshai, now asking for food, now breaking into a song, now lecturing him, suggests a fundamentally human bonding, stripped of societal preoccupation with kinship or class affinities. One will also recall the episode where Pallaram's pounding on the table creates a pandemonium, prompting Dadamoshai to "yell" for Banamali (Tagore 2007, 40). "Yelling for the servant" — so naturally domestic an act, so quintessentially Bengali a scene — does detract from the hagiographic image of Tagore the sage. Of course, the self-deflation is absolutely intentional. Tagore is implicitly cutting himself down to size by reminding the reader that yelling at a servant is something Dadamoshai is not above doing. The text *Shey* subjects any attempt on Dadamoshai's part to foreground that public 'epic' identity of his to ruthless deflation. A notable example would be the episode in which Dadamoshai's endeavour to impress Pupe with a bombastic and admittedly ironic catalogue of committees to which he has been elected meets with candid ridicule:

'Dadamoshai, you talk so much nonsense for no reason at all that no one ever believes you when you say you don't have the time for something. Today you simply have to tell me what He did when he got his body back.' (Tagore 2007, 90-1)

On another occasion, challenged by Shey, Dadamoshai has to confess to having lied about an appointment with the Viceroy:

'Good, but what did you mean by saying you were going to the viceroy's house?'
'I meant I wished to be rid of your presence. Once you sit down, you show no sign of getting up. It was just a polite way of saying, "Scoot!" (Tagore 2007, 53)

Clearly, to both Shey and Pupudidi, Dadamoshai comes across as a far from reliable or unpretentious narrator. This is a ploy that we, after Bakhtin, may well regard as a typically "novelistic" gesture of ironic laughter at the kind of pretension to grandeur, sublimity, sanctity or authenticity that goes into the making of high literature. In *Shey* Tagore abjures the magisterial voice of the Wordsworthian

egotistical sublime — the man speaking to men. Therefore, it is not automatically a Romantic text by dint of its espousal of values contrary to the Enlightenment creed. Both in terms of its willingness to accommodate the actual and the fantastical on the same plane and its refusal to privilege the I-narrator and authorial persona — the septuagenarian Dadamoshai — over Shey or Pupe — the text seems to conform to the Bakhtinian understanding of the carnivalesque, with its "sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities":

This experience, opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idioms are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (*à l'envers*), of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrownings. ... (Bakhtin 1984, 11)

The political implications of privileging Pupe over Sukumar are also buttressed by Shey's maker's insistence on Shey's scrupulously ordinary, unheroic, character, far removed from the pomposity of epic or romance characters — "a prince, a robber, an ogre or a general's son". This amounts to a potent critique of the martialist, masculinist, nationalist, imperialist Western state apparatus which Tagore will go on to denounce in *Sabhyatar Sankat – The Crisis of Civilisation*. Shey's alternative masculinity (masculinity, nonetheless) metonymically contained in the reference to his irrepressible animal hirsuteness — is so terrible in its primal, aboriginal, starkness — like the grotesque male faces and forms Tagore sketched and painted so maniacally — that it can by no means be equated with the spruced up, clean shaven, superficially placid, urbane handsomeness of the European male that Kaiser Wilhelm II may well be said to have iconised. The latter — the exact antithesis of the uncontrollably hairy,

unkempt and uncouth Shey - would be a perfectly allegorical image of the designing and hypocritical European civilisation, advancing its territorial suzerainty under the cover of the White Man's Burden. The contrast between the noble humanist image of the body and the grotesque Rabelaisian body is also something that did not escape Bakhtin's notice (1981, 178):

To the medieval body, coarse, hawking, farting, yawning, spitting, hiccupping, noisily nose-blowing, endlessly chewing and drinking – there is contrasted the elegant, cultured body of the humanist, harmoniously developed through sports...

The physical description of Shey too betrays the equivocating, anti-essentialist indeterminacy characterising the text itself. Shey's portrayal shows the same dynamics that Bakhtin (1981, 35) writes of:

Laughter destroyed epic distance; it began to investigate man freely and familiarly, to turn him inside out, expose the disparity between his surface and his center, between his potential and his reality. A dynamic authenticity was introduced into the image of man, dynamics of consistency and tension between various factors of this image; man ceased to coincide with himself, and consequently men ceased to be exhausted entirely by the plots that contain them.

The first illustration of the text shows a florid, corpulent, face, not unlike portraits by Franz Hals (Tagore 2007, 2). But Dadamoshai is quick to dispel this initial impression of a merely grotesque body by insisting on the actual Shey's awe-inspiring stature:

Those who have actually seen him know that he's tall and well built, his features grave. Just as the night is lit up by the glow of countless stars, hidden laughter lurks behind his pretence of gravity. He is a person of the very highest order; all our joking can't demean him. I enjoy disguising him as a fool, because, actually, he's far cleverer than I am. If we pretend he doesn't understand anything, it doesn't hurt his dignity. Rather, it's convenient, as it helps him match Pupu's temperament (Tagore 2007, 9-10).

The enigma of that description reminds us of some of Tagore's self-portraits. The oxymoronic expression – outward seriousness barely concealing laughter – is a classic feature, we will recall, of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque:

It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone... The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. ... (Bakhtin 1984, 11-13)

This is followed by a totally bathetic description of Shey's loss of his Brahmin's "holy hair-tuft" and the savage hairiness that ensues from that crisis of identity.

No sooner had the doctor smeared on a little of the Thunder-Tangle ointment a hermit had once given him, than the tuft set itself doggedly to growing, like some endless centipede. If our He dons a turban, the turban keeps swelling like a balloon. At night, the gigantic mound of hair on his pillow resembles a devil's toadstool (Tagore 2007, 8).

In later chapters where he lectures Dadamoshai on his alternative construct of beauty, we can almost visualise a Shey who fuses into the sublimely ugly creator he apotheosises. Thus his sweetmeat-loving corpulence, his height, his hirsuteness, and his advancing ugliness are all accommodated within a strangely androgynous identity complementing the hybridity suggested by his name. Dadamoshai and Pupe remain conspiratorially silent about his name, which, interestingly, is supposed to begin with the 'p' of Pupe.

Some say Priyanath, some decide on Panchanan, some think of Panchkari, some insist it's Pitambar, others suggest Paresh, Peters, Prescott, Peer Bux and Piyaar Khan (Tagore 2007, 6).

In his dogged reluctance to fetter Shey with a name – 'Perhaps I'm afraid that if I tell you his name, he'll come to rest within

his name alone' – Shey's maker seems to have conferred on him an identity at once cosmopolitan and quintessentially Bengali. I endorse the implied logic behind the oxymoronic title of *Shey*'s English translation as *He (Shey)*, in that it so aptly bears out both the ambiguous gendering and the dichotomous play on the particular-general contained in the Bengali word.

Shey's dynamic characterisation – a feature Bakhtin (1981, 10) would associate with the novel's notion of the hero – nonetheless frustrates the Bakhtinian calculation that the novel's self-aware protagonist matures through experience. Shey's is, if at all, a lopsided Bildungsroman, where he regresses steadily into savagery instead of progressing into civilisation. Towards the end of the book when Pupe enquires after Shey, Dadamoshai apprises her is that Shey's "grown older":

'He's become a thinker. Worries buzz like hornets in his head, and have built a nest of cares. I can no longer match him in argument.'

'I see he's progressing on a line parallel to my own.'

'That may be so, but he's crossed the limits of fiction.'

Now and then, he clenches his fist and declares, "I must grow tougher!" (Tagore 2007, 111-12)

In Shey's scheme of things, therefore, regress into childishness is progress. Not surprisingly, he reprimands Dadamoshai in an oxymoron, "Stop being so old. Here you are, ageing, but you've yet to mature into childishness." (Tagore 2007, 23)

The first-person narrator of *Shey* systematically decentres himself, allowing the text and its eponymous protagonist to steer the story away from any readerly expectation of coherence and cohesiveness. Dadamoshai pleads writerly *ennui* as a reason for authorial slackness and uses this pretext of a limp imagination to accommodate an only too enthusiastic surrogate author – Shey. The narrative mode is carnivalesque in that it allows the text – the matter, the body – to assert itself autonomously – unhindered by an overbearing authorial presence. Instead, the author maintains a

tactical low profile. Dadamoshai is quick to point out, time and again, how both Pupe and Shey share the authorial mantle with him. About Pupe's contributions, he writes.

My hands alone had begun to build up the history of this man, but now Pupe keeps adding to it wherever it takes her fancy. If I say that at three in the afternoon he came to my room to borrow a razor and some empty biscuit tins, Pupe informs me that he has made off with her crochet hooks. (Tagore 2007, 8)

Then, there is Shey's importunate insistence on being brought back to life:

'But I'm not ready to be finished off, Dada. I beg of you, do ease Pupu-didi's fears. Tell her it was only a story.' ... 'I'm the juggler, the shape-shifter in Pupu-didi's stories – it'll kill me to be ousted from a position of such importance.' (Tagore 2007, 80)

The latter reverences not Dadamoshai but Pupe as his ultimate arbiter of literary taste: "I'm your Pupu-didi's He!" (Tagore 2007, 72)

In Shey's perception, Dadamoshai exists solely to please Pupe and Pupe's literary predilections are emphatically non-epic, non-romantic, anti-intellectual, indeed anti-adult. Shey makes it his business to warn Dadamoshai periodically against seeing the two worlds, his own and Pupe's, as either identical or reconcilable. The by no means easy task of coming up with stories that Pupe would like, according to Shey, involves a conscious rejection of the kind of marvellous and, at the same time, the kind of the credible, that goes into the conception of epic and romance characters and plots.

'... The other day, you made up a string of stupid stories about me and reeled them off to Pupu-didi. Being a child, she swallowed it all. If you must tell fantastic tales, put some craftsmanship into the telling.' ...

'...But if you insist you'd treated your guest to curried giraffe, whale fried in mustard paste, pulao with a hippopotamus dragged kicking from the mud and stir-fried stumps of palm trees, I can't but call it clumsy. Anyone can write like that.' (Tagore 2007, 49)

That is not to say that *Shey* as a text is either totally realist or totally fantastical, for it allows the realistic and the unrealistic to operate in mutual amity on the same mimetic level. It overturns expectations as to where the real might be expected to surface and where the unreal. Such expectations are generally honoured by the epic and the romance despite their pervasive use of the supra-natural. So that, the character of Shey himself and the life that he ordinarily leads is represented as routinely human, while that of several other human and un-human ones who surface in the narrative every now and then is fantastical and comically grotesque. Significantly, Pupe, Shey and Dadamoshai's interactions with all the fictive characters, human, animal or supernatural, are reported without a trace of awe, mystique or condescension as being perfectly equitable, matter-of-fact, and commonsensical. Heroic narratives magnify the human protagonists with a view to glorifying them and, conversely, magnify the subhuman antagonists with a view to glorifying the humans who conquer them. In *Shey*, by contrast, the subhuman – Ghantakarna or Bell Ear, for example – are often deemed more heroic than the human protagonists. The interchangeability of the human and the animal condition, exemplified in the episode where Shey receives a gorilla's brain by transplant (Tagore 2007, 92), is here a literary expression of a playful anti-anthropocentrism. Not only is the automatic equation of human action with the heroic played down, the human claim to heroism is presented as no more deserving that that of subhuman creatures. Ironical undermining of human narcissism is also accomplished through a sustained debunking. For an apt example we may turn to that scatological reference to uncontrollable, involuntary, acts of self-assertion by the body such as the sneeze - of human language, man's mindless abuse of words in intellectual discourse, of preposterously arcane, recondite, scientific projects (Tagore 2007, 11-16).

... They remind us that speech is man's invention, not Nature's gift. Our incessant babbling daily shortens our breath, and our lives in the long run. Apes, with their natural intelligence, were the first to discover this. Monkeys, created right in the second

stage of evolution, survive to this day. Alone on that desolate island, the scientists have pledged absolute deference to this ancient wisdom. They sit in complete silence, gazing at the ground. On that entire island, not a sound issues from human lips; all one can hear are gigantic sneezes (Tagore 2007, 14).

The body mythicised here is, as Bakhtin would say in the essay 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel',

...not the individual body, trapped in an irreversible life sequence, that becomes a character – rather it is the impersonal body, the body of the human race as a whole, being born, living, dying the most varied deaths, being born again, an impersonal body that is manifested in its structure, and in all the processes of its life (Bakhtin 1981, 173).

In the topsy-turvy world of *Shey*, as in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the rational is more fantastical than the fantastical, and vice versa. Ironical though it may sound, in view of Tagore's professed ambivalence, it is in seminal writings of the European and English Renaissance, in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1979, 78), or Montaigne's *Apology for Raimond Sebond* (1991, 505) and even in Jonathan Swift's fictional exercise in an anti-Enlightenment relativism, *Gulliver's Travels*, that one may locate a comparable anti-anthropocentrism. Like all these texts that intentionally dislodge man from his assumed position of Biblically ordained pre-eminence either by presenting human behaviour as preposterously bestial and irrational or by representing animals as more rational and human in their behaviour than they are credited with, *Shey* too constantly invites the reader to relativise her self-perception as a human being. One is reminded of Dadamoshai's story about tigers being "scared stiff of being reborn as humans" because, "in their opinion, the human body is entirely bald, and quite grotesque. Men can't even boast of tails! They need wives just to whisk the flies off their backs. They look like clowns, toddling about on two legs – the sight makes the tigers laugh till they cry." (Tagore 2007, 60)

This essay cannot confirm Tagore's acquaintance with that cult text in Renaissance anthropocentrism – Pico della Mirandola's Oration (bearing the not entirely misleading title *On the Dignity of Man*). However, the Tiger Pundit's ironic comment on man as a hurriedly put together and hence congenitally flawed creation of a resource-starved Creator may well be read as a carnivalesque deflation of that text:

The most renowned contemporary tiger-expert on the history and habits of his race says that when Lord Vishwakarma had nearly finished making the world and was running low on materials, he felt a sudden urge to create humans. Let alone paws, he couldn't even muster a few hooves for the poor creatures – they hide the shame of their naked feet with shoes and of their bodies with clothes. Humankind is the only form of life that suffers from embarrassment. No other creature on earth feels such shame (Tagore 2007, 60).

Earlier on, the Panchatantra tale of *The Blue Jackal* is retold with a frighteningly Modernist ending. Shiburam the jackal who sacrificed his tail to his own overreaching ends up an alienated outcast, who neither belongs among humans nor in his original habitat, and nostalgically locates his dead soul in his lost tail (Tagore 2007, 23). Gosai-ji's Prospero-like machinations condemn this Caliban and relegate him to an Existentialist limbo:

Shibu is now forbidden to visit the grove where he used to live, because the other jackals, seeing him approach, either run away or growl and snap at him. He lives in the old holy porch in the sole company of a pair of owls. Even Khadu, Gobar, Benchhi, Dheri and the other young scamps are too scared of ghosts to go looking for karamchas in that part of the forest (Tagore 2007, 21-2).

Both Dadamoshai and Shey are obsessed with their bodies, the one with the putative infirmity of his age and the other with his unapologetically voracious appetite for the quintessentially Bengali cuisine. Dadamoshai writes of Shey, "if you can build a clear image

of this man in your mind's eye, you'll realize that when he sits on the steps of a sweet shop, gulping down rosogollas, oblivious of the juice seeping through the holes in the packet and dripping on to his dirty dhoti..." (Tagore 2007, 7)

Typically, Pupe too asserts her preference for the story of how Shey found his body back after losing it over Dadamoshai's long pompous monologue about the numerous offices of importance conferred upon him. This is despite its ironic treatment of officialdom and India's complacency with an illusory quasi-statehood. *Shey* is a carnivalesque text in its persistent foregrounding, among other things, of forbidden bodily pleasures such as cannabis addiction. It does so as unapologetically as Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, that strikingly similar piece of prose-fiction, published in 1594, which presents itself as an alcohol-induced after-dinner speech.¹ Tagore, like Nashe, seems to be deliberately subverting the norm of respectability in literature by introducing the irreverent and the disreputable. Needless to say, this is a bold statement with significant implications for the politics of literature. It is as boldly radical as Tagore's presentation of grotesque zoomorphic creatures, of comparably grotesque human forms on canvas, and even some of his deliberately eerie preternatural self-portraits. The prominence attached to the body and to the idea that humans, even texts, live essentially in the body, is the pivot of this upside-down politics of literature.

Further, *Shey* is an overwhelmingly carnivalesque text in the persistence with which it highlights its material, bodily reality as a book and text. This persistence is to be contrasted with the loftier claim usually made by authors to an esoteric, ideological, magisterial, programme of messianic teaching, within which the spirit of a book acquires something of a larger than life immortality countering its material perishability. No wonder Dadamoshai makes such raucous fun of Milton's *Areopagitica*, which asserts precisely such suprahuman, immutable immortality for the book. Milton wrote, "for books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul

was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.”² Dadamoshai writes:

I was preparing some notes on the *Areopagitica* for an MA class. For this I needed to consult a book – *The International Mellifluous Abracadabra* and also had to slit open the pages of *Three Hundred Years of Indo-Indetermination*, to look things up in its Appendix (Tagore 2007, 79).

The fact that this essay deliberately refrains from designating *Shey* as a ‘novel’ – which it emphatically is not - or even as a ‘narrative’ – which it only imperfectly is - preferring instead the more ambiguous label ‘text’, makes it incumbent upon me to explain the assumed relevance of the Bakhtinian dichotomisation of the epic and the novel. Needless to say, Bakhtin’s understanding of the novel not simply as a dynamic genre but, more fundamentally, as a literary, aesthetic, cultural ideology, allows him to locate “novelizing” tendencies in “low” literature preceding the advent of the novel. Once the ‘novel’ form, in its narrow generic sense, has been standardised and fixed in the same way as the epic, such an understanding can indeed allow us to locate “novelizing” tendencies in texts like *Shey* that challenge or subvert the aesthetics and politics of the “classic” novel. Bakhtin (1981, 6-7) writes:

What are the salient features of this novelization of other genres suggested by us above? They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the “novelistic” layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).

In that paradoxical sense, *Shey* is more of a ‘novel’ than Tagore’s novels precisely because it is not like them.

Such an understanding of the ‘novel’ as an immanent tendency in literature across the ages would also endorse the deliberately anachronistic comparison that this essay makes between Tagore’s *Shey* and Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller*. The relationship between *Shey* the person and *Shey* the text goes beyond mere eponymity. In fact, that relationship may well be understood in comparison with Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller*. Like *Shey*, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, too, is a fantastical narrative that takes liberties with chronology and places real historical personages such as the Earl of Surrey on the same plane with a fictive one like Jack Wilton. It too prioritises the inconsequential story of an un-hero, something of a flaneur-onlooker of the pageant of sixteenth-century European history, over, say, an *Orlando-Furioso*-like grand narrative. In Bakhtinian language, both Dadamoshai, Tagore’s physically infirm story-teller persona, and *Shey*, his younger, physically active, nomadic, sporadically appearing, counterpart, seem to embody the “philosophy of the third person in private life ... who knows only private life and craves it alone, but who does not participate in it, who has no place in it – and therefore, sees it in sharp focus, as a whole, in all its nakedness, playing out all its roles but not fusing his identity with any one of them.” (Bakhtin 1981, 126)

Shey is a supremely vibrant, vital, life-affirming presence in the text. He asserts his vitality in terms of his unabashedly voracious appetite, and the self-professedly infirm Dadamoshai basks in his reflected vitality. This is precisely the irrepressible spirit of Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* and its protagonist Jack Wilton, who, like *Shey*, is identified by a name that is deliberately nondescript and unprepossessing. Moreover, Wilton lives, Nashe underlines by punning on his status as gentleman “page”, exclusively on the pages of the pamphlet. At the same time, both Jack Wilton and *Shey* are rooted in their respective racial and cultural identities. The one is English and Anglican in faith, the other a thoroughbred Bengali. This privileging of the protagonist’s indigenous identity over a more socially elite, culturally cosmopolitan one could be seen as an extension of the carnivalesque: a rejection, yet again, of the highbrow

in literature, identified with classical languages and the epic genre. It is also interesting that Tagore should identify oral story-telling as an essentially feminine forte, a domain of the imagination that he wryly remarks in *Chhelebel* (published 1940) as having beaten a hasty retreat under the tyranny of bookish institutionalised learning. He recalls wistfully in *Chhelebel* how his mother would sit down on the walled terrace and chat about this and that with her female friends and how these conversations lacked the purely factual news value that one associates with newspapers and other instruments of purportedly serious dissemination of knowledge. His description of the Acharjini's gossip bulletins (Tagore 1988, XI:108) recalls the comparable beginnings of news through broadsides and ballads circulated by peddlers in early modern England. One may recall Autolycus in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Like Dadamoshai, the adult narrator ventriloquising his childhood self in *Chhelebel* is ironically self-disparaging in respect of any masculine heroic pretensions or aspirations his actions might betray. Just like Dadamoshai, who is embarrassed about his celebrity status in the world that is outside the solipsistic retreat he shares with Pupe and Shey, the child of *Chhelebel* is a failed, half-hearted, ambivalent hero, an idle surrogate female, more interested in imagining through lazy afternoons than in book learning, one who spends the bulk of his time in the seclusion of his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi's attic room. The Introduction to *Chhelebel* is sardonic about the impact of scientific fact on the imagination: "the distance between the probable and the improbable had not been considerable until scientific survey came to be seen as the sole arbiter of intelligence and rationality." (Tagore 1988, XI: 95)

Not coincidentally, perhaps, *Shey*'s Sidney-like privileging of literary truth over mere fact is endorsed by Tagore in *Sahitya*, published in 1907, where he writes

.... what I see in nature becomes perceptible to me, my senses testify to its existence. What literature shows is natural but not perceptible. Therefore, literature has to compensate for its own lack of perceptibility.

There lies the difference between nature's fact and literary truth. ...

and, again,

What the mind picks up amidst the undifferentiated multitude of nature's facts, literature in its turn acts upon them alone. Just as the mind is not a mirror to nature, so also literature is not a mirror to nature. The mind transforms the natural into the psychic, and literature transforms the psychic into the literary. (Tagore 1989, X: 310-11)

Like *Shey* the character who arrives unannounced at a pointedly unearthly hour, *Shey* the text, too, starts unceremoniously. Its ceremony, if at all, is about providing a self-consciously repetitive preamble to its own radical aesthetic parameters. Superficially viewed, the text *Shey* seems to flow out, unpremeditated, un-preconceived, of the same pen that produced the drawings that along with the purposely disjointed, episodic narrative constitute its totality. It is also representative of Tagore's enigmatic body of paintings, etchings and sketches. It is not a coincidence that *Shey* should first make its appearance when Dadamoshai is busy painting and that it should end with Sukumar's rambling description of his personal history as a painter (Tagore 2007, 153-4). It is worth recalling that Tagore presents himself in stray letters as an untutored painter. The emphasis here is not on having taught himself, but rather on discarding the conscious intervention of the thinking, remembering, self, that reproducing taught lessons in any form of cerebral exercise involves. The emphasis, therefore, is on allowing free-play to the instinctual, imagining self that a child left to its own intellectual devices tends to manifest.

If I were a finished artist I would probably have a preconceived idea to be made into a picture. This is no doubt a rewarding experience. But it is greater fun when the mind is seized upon by something outside of it, some surprise element which gradually evolves into an understandable shape. I am so taken with this new game that all my various responsibilities, extraneous to myself, peep in from outside my door only to

withdraw the next moment with much shaking of the head. If I were a free agent as of yore, unburdened by any cares, do you realise what I would have done? I would live by the Padma and gather a harvest of pictures and nothing but pictures to load the Golden Boat of Time with. (Tagore 2005, 63)

Of course, the seeming randomness and inconsequentiality of the stories that Dadamoshai sets out to weave around *Shey*, like the seeming randomness of the lines that form his paintings,³ is actually the product of a careful artistic arrangement of a set of non-events. These non-events are carefully chosen by the author precisely because they counter the ingredients of a grand epic narrative:

His elder sister falls ill; he goes for the doctor. A cat scratches his dog Tommy on the nose. He hops onto the back of a bullock cart and gets into a great argument with the carter. He slips and falls at the washing place in the yard and breaks the cook's earthen pitchers. He goes to watch a Mohun Bagan football match and someone swipes three and a half annas from his pocket, so he misses buying sweets from Bhim Nag's (Tagore 2007, 5).

The Unfortunate Traveller and *Shey* are remarkably similar texts in that their respective preoccupation with the corporeal and the material extends to their acute self-awareness as texts and to their central protagonists' self-awareness as existing solely within these texts. *Shey* begins with a Sidneian pronouncement on literature as poesis, creation with words.

'Tell us a story,' meaning, 'make people out of words'. So new creations evolved – fairy-tale princes, ministers and their sons, spoilt queens and neglected queens, mermaids, the Arabian Nights, Robinson Crusoe, and many, many more. ... Even old men, on office holidays, said, 'Make some people', and the *Mahabharata* was composed, in eighteen volumes. ... (Tagore 2007, 1)

This essentially inventive exercise is mimetic only in the sense that it emulates God's creation, not in the sense of verisimilitude – "they are only to play with, not answerable to truth or falsehood" (Tagore 2007, 1). But Dadamoshai's narrative of a history of storytelling

is also Nasheian in its foregrounding of the textual existence of stories, either oral or written. Hence, the stark, elemental description of the materiality of poesis. Dadamoshai reminds us of the carefree artistic abandon with which he created a personage exclusively of words for whom he is not answerable to anyone in the real world:

The chief prop of the story I've been telling Pupu-didi bears a pronoun for a name and is constituted entirely of words. So I can do what I like with him, without fear of tripping on any awkward questions (Tagore 2007, 7-8).

The same utter disregard of the compulsion to mean, to make sense, to ground himself in a rationally ordered understanding of what is otherwise experienced as reality at random informs Tagore's paintings. By contrast, his novels and his short stories and his discursive writings all conform to the principle of a poet-thinker's didactic responsibility. He writes to Nirmal Kumar Mahalanobis on 7 November 1928:

I am hopelessly entangled in the spell that the lines have cast all around me. The muse of poetry has left these quarters for good and all, peeved by my favouritism towards the *inconnu* – although I am past the age of indiscretion. I have almost managed to forget that there was a time when I used to write poetry. It is the element of unpredictability in art which seems to fascinate me strongly. The subject matter of a poem can be traced back to some dim thought in the mind. Once it leaves the matted crown of Siva, the stream of poetry flows along its measured course – well-defined by its two banks. While painting, the process adopted by me is quite the reverse. First, there is the hint of a line, then the line becomes a form. The more pronounced the form becomes the clearer becomes the picture to my conception. This creation of form is a source of endless wonder (Tagore 2005, 63).

Although it embodies the aestheticism that Tagore promotes in that lecture he delivered in America, 'What is Art?' (Tagore 1980, 93),⁴ *Shey*, notwithstanding its conscious rejection of didactic, rational, literary purpose, ought not to be seen as Tagore's self-indulgent capitulation to literary hedonism. In spite of the professed artistic abandon that

goes into its making, Tagore would say, as he does in *Sahitya*, insofar as all literature is expression, it implicitly assumes a readership:

A literary artist can hardly be believed to write purely to please himself. ... That which is expressed is the text, and not the underlying current of feeling. One ought to evaluate a literary text, knowing that it is written for others and not exclusively for one's self (Tagore 1988, X: 309).

This self-reflexivity in both Nashe and Tagore leads them to a privileging of their authorial involvement in the text over any other meta-textual concern, be it about mimetic verisimilitude, didactic intent, socio-political responsibility or even aesthetic discipline. *Shey* announces its revolt against the grand narrative of epic and romance – of “high” literature as Bakhtin would call it – at the very outset:

Many stories start, ‘Once there lived a king.’ But I began, ‘There lives a man.’ Also, in this story of mine, there is no trace of what people usually call a story. This man didn’t cross the field of Tepantar on a magic horse. One night, after ten o’clock, he came to my room. I was reading a book. He said, ‘Dada, I’m hungry.’ ...

There was a push at the door. Opening it, I saw – not a robber, not an ogre, not even a general’s son – but that very man. He was dripping from head to toe with water, and his dirty wet clothes clung tightly to his frame. ...

Every story has a beginning and an end, but my ‘There lives a man’ has no end. ...

Now who is this story about? Our He isn’t a prince, but a very ordinary man. He eats, sleeps, goes to the office and is fond of the cinema. His story lies in what everyone does every day. (Tagore 2007, 3-5)

Both Dadamoshai and *Shey*’s determined ordinariness may be defined in terms of a contrast with Bakhtin’s description of the epic or romance hero as a “*public* and *political* man of ancient times, a man governed by his socio-political, philosophical and utopian interests.” (Tagore 1981, 104)

Like Bakhtin’s novel, which is almost an eternally present continuous form, eternally contemporary, *Shey*’s story too is anti-Aristotelian in its rejection of amplitude. Not only does *Shey* do the same ordinary things every day, he lives in the eternal present of a text that refuses to start or end in accordance with principles of formal classical unity. We recall Bakhtin’s identification of the epic as a genre located absolutely and ineluctably in the past: “Whatever its origins, the epic as it has come down to us is an absolutely completed and finished generic form, whose constitutive feature is the transferral of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times.” (Bakhtin 1981, 15)

II

The prefatory verses addressed to Charuchandra Bhattacharya (Tagore 1988, IX: 670) with which the Bengali text of *Shey* begins convert the formulaic humility topos of a formal dedication into an alternative paradigm of creative writing. In this aesthetically and politically radical literary manifesto, the insignificant is privileged over the important and the business-like, non-sense over sense, capricious flights of fantasy over serious discourse, the quotidian over the momentous, the crude and rustic over the urbane and sophisticated, the imbecile and the senile over the sane and mature, the irrational over the rational, and, on final analysis, the primitive over the putatively civilised. An alternative poetics inevitably entails for Tagore an alternative subaltern politics of reception, which insinuates that only the humble masses refreshingly unencumbered with serious cerebral exertion can afford to be interested in the refreshingly inconsequential in literature and art. The reading community to which a text like *Shey* might appeal and from which a protagonist like *Shey* might emanate is self-consciously dissociated from the power-wielding class that ostensibly shoulders the burden of steering society towards progress and amelioration.

Shey’s recognisably urban moorings notwithstanding, he is essentially one with the “pagol” (mad dreamer), “khyapa” (wandering

madcap), “lokkhichhara” (god-forsaken), “raakhaal chhele” (shepherd boy) or “arab-bedouin” we encounter in Tagore’s poetry and songs. These Romantic personae of the poet Tagore are all voluntary exiles from the collective project of civilisation and progress, all peregrinating, drifting minstrels of an alternative way of life, alternative because it is neither blindly progressive nor automatically retrogressive. Where society insists on stasis, they push for restless action, and where society demands business, they retire into exultant insouciance. They pay court to that brand of progress that is sensitive to nature’s message of combining continuity with change, eternity with contingency.

There, this essay would contend, the Romanticist reading ought to pause. For, notwithstanding the Blakeian overtones in Tagore’s assimilation of “amangal” or “evil” in his literary theory, *Shey* and *Shey* both transcend the dialectics of the Lamb and the Tyger, reaching back to an imagined grotesque, which though rooted in a re-reading of Indian mythology, has far more in common with the carnivalesque, Rabelaisian, strain in Renaissance European and English literature. After all, Tagore’s *Jibansmriti* professes serious reservations about English Romanticism, stemming from a reluctance to see literature exclusively as an expression of the unrestrained affect. Tagore was also of the view that English or European Romanticism was after all a phenomenon that emanated naturally from an upheaval that was peculiarly European in its historical politics. It could therefore never quite prove culturally productive by being simply mechanically transported to Indian soil (Tagore 1989, XI: 62-3).

The ‘older’ *Shey* expounds a profoundly ambiguous myth of creation and apocalypse. It is based on a comprehensive understanding of all art – music, literature and painting – as attaining sublimity not via the delicate beauty or ‘fearful symmetry’ but the monstrous, the preternaturally hideous, i.e. the ‘adbhut’. To quote from *He* (*Shey*), “The victory of the hideous over the beautiful, the discordant over the melodious – the Puranas celebrate this principle with laughter and rejoicing, as you will notice if you leaf through the *Annadamangal*.” (Tagore 2007, 122)

III

Notwithstanding the pronounced satire and irony underlying that exposition, an irony that ought to caution us against reading Tagore as a Modernist, its ambiguity stems from the fact that *Shey*, the dazzlingly eloquent satirist, seems implicitly in sympathy with that alternative mythopoeia. Though, by this time, Dadamoshai, long impatient to rid himself of *Shey*, seems to have dissociated himself completely from the latter’s point of view, the palpable creative relish which the paradoxical encomium exudes suggests a deliberate authorial equivocation. For, of this ‘self-same’ *Shey*, we might well say, in Tagore’s own words culled from those songs celebrating the spirit of constructive iconoclasm – “We are the heralds of a new youthful impetuosity/ We are restive, we are weird” (translation mine) – “aamra nuton joubaneri dut/ aamra chanchal, aamra adbhut” from *Tasher Desh* (Tagore 1999, II:588) – or “aamra lokkhichharar dal”:

We are a god-forsaken bunch of no-good nincompoops, as tremblingly fleeting as water droplets on a lotus leaf/ Our comings and goings are of no consequence/ We are privy to no causes, know no protocol, nor heed discipline and caution -/ We have unshackled ourselves by dint of our own grit/ Let your trailing satellites gorge themselves on your benisons, o goddess of bounty – let us roam the world with our rags and our backpacks/ your harbours are thick with ships carrying your gold ingots/ there are gems galore at your numerous marts – while we are perennially adrift on our ramshackle boats with torn anchors/ it’s our turn to look for the shores of these shoreless waters, for the lone island amidst the ocean of feeling/ if we do not come by a needle, no matter, we shall dive and plumb the depths of hell. (Tagore 1999, II: 571)⁵

The text *Shey* as well as its eponymous protagonist realise a project of long standing. It is a project entailing the systematic reversal of existential priorities, a conscious choice of precisely those paths of life that civilisation tends to dismiss as unworldliness and folly. In this essentially radical blueprint for life, the subaltern status is more of a permanent and cultivated state of mind, a steadfast

persistence in pursuing lopsided priorities, a paradoxical conviction that in everything from ethics to politics to culture, privation is privilege, disempowerment is power. In other words, it points towards a revolt against everything that a child is systematically taught to renounce in its journey towards adulthood. The untutored child therefore comes to be identified with something like a utopian configuration. It is an epitome of everything that humans have blindly given up in course of their individual and collective march towards what is only purportedly progress and everything that humans therefore have to recover within themselves in order to achieve genuine progress and happiness. In so far as this untutored child is a role model for the adult who has strayed too far from the child within him, the literature that iconises this child is emphatically not children's literature. It is insidiously prescriptive writing for adults disguised as a self-sufficient piece of 'pure' literature meant for children's consumption. *Shey*, however, does not idealise this child in the Romantic mode. Pupe is no Lucy, in the sense in which Krishnakali is. Besides, *Shey* is a pointedly urban text, and this is evident from its systematic mapping of early twentieth-century Kolkata. The person *Shey* is something of a Dickensian flaneur, about whom Dadamoshai observes on one occasion: "If you ask me, 'And then?' I'll tell you how he then boards a tram, finds he has no money in his pocket and jumps off again. 'And then?' Then follow many such events – from Barabazar to Bahubazar, from Bahubazar to Nimtala." (Tagore 2007, 7) Indeed, pastoral Santiniketan figures only nominally in *Shey* except in terms of imagined landscapes envisioned on Dadamoshai's canvas, which are too stark, too rugged, too grim, to be pastoral. There is pointed mention, instead, of Bolpur Station (Tagore 2007, 36).

Nor is *Shey*, by dint of its predominantly urban locale, automatically a Modernist text. Its un-heroic protagonists, Dadamoshai and *Shey*, are not to be equated with the alienated, disaffected un-heroes of Modernist literature. As in his other writings, *Raktakarabi*, *Raja* or *Sangeet O Bhaava*, or even in paintings leading up to that thunderous denunciation of Western civilisation in *Sabhyataar Sankat*, so also in a text like *Shey*, Tagore seems to

be at pains to steer clear of Western realism. He might not have automatically recognized an ideologically kindred spirit in Western modernism on the basis of what we today perceive as Western modernism's critique of Western civilisation. Had that been the case, Tagore would not have confessed to having wrenched himself away from English literature when confronted with the disjunction between the humanist ideals of fairness and justice it upholds and the savage reality of English colonial rule in India. There is a tendency in that seminal essay to see literature as either tacitly colluding in the Western state apparatus' hoodwinking of the world or casting a haze over European *realpolitik*. In this all-encompassing, blanket denunciation of the totality of Western civilisation, Tagore disowns his youthful infatuation with English literature as a dangerous distraction from the glaring reality of Britain's imperial rapacity.

I was born in a milieu that had come to associate the English race with an overriding sense of fair play, justice and equity. This admiration coupled with our natural affinity for literature had prompted us to apotheosise the English. So much for the first phase of my life. Thereafter came the rift, gradually stemming from terrible sorrow. Daily I witnessed how cavalier the champions of civilisation were in flouting out of sheer avarice precisely the civilisation that they so proudly maintained as an outcome of excellence of character.

Soon I felt impelled to leave the ivory tower where I had blissfully immersed myself in the delectations of literature (Tagore 1990, XIII: 736).

It is hardly to be expected that Tagore, who translated Eliot's 'The Journey of the Magi', would not have known of the implications of, say, Eliot's *The Waste Land*. However, it is significant that he should have chosen to translate the former rather than *The Waste Land*, a poetic testament to a ravaged, dismembered civilisation

reeling from the collective suicide of civil war. Indeed, *Shey*'s ironic paean to the strong-lined verse could well be read as a critique of Modernist poetry:

At the beginning of the new age, when Grandfather God created poets to bring mankind under the rule of weakness, he moulded them on the lines of the birds. That day there was a kind of literary gathering in his meeting hall and, as president, he exhorted all the poets who had gathered there to keep flying through space in their minds, to break into song for no reason at all, to turn everything unyielding into rippling liquid, to make soft what was sturdy. You're the King of Poets – you've obeyed his decree to this day.'

'I'll have to go on doing so, until I'm moulded differently.'

'The modern age is growing hard and dry; you won't get your soft waxen moulds any longer. The Goddess of Femininity no longer sits in a nest rocking on the water, swung back and forth by the swaying lotuses. The world isn't sunk in the depths of languid delicacy (Tagore 2007, 119).

Is this self-disparagement or Tagore's satire on his detracting poet-successors? The answer would probably be the latter. When Pupe confesses to have been taken in by this apotheosis of literary masculinity, Dadamoshai has to correct her feminine fascination with the brute force so antithetical to her being:

'That's because you're a woman. Oppression still fascinates you. You're charmed by the strength of the person who beats you.'

'Well, I can't say I like to be violently attacked – but when maleness assumes its most terrible form, fist upraised, it seems sublime.'

'Let me tell you what I think. Manliness doesn't lie in a tyrannical flaunting of power – quite the contrary. To this day, it's been man that's created beauty and fought with the discordant. Evil pretends to be powerful only to the extent that man is cowardly. I find constant proof of this in the world today.' (Tagore 2007, 130)

Dadamoshai is succinctly implicating the logic by which the Modernist aesthetics of literary retaliation against the tyrannical forces of a masculinist Western civilisation endorses the same masculinism by mirroring it.

This essay is by no means written in oblivion of Tagore's critique in *Jiban-Smriti* of the amoral excess characterising the literature of the Shakespearean age (Tagore XI, 62). It nonetheless contends that in *Shey*, one is confronted with a worldview that a reader acquainted with the literature of the European and English Renaissance cannot but find intersections with. Tagore's theoretical position on European Literature is often rigidly essentialist and ideologically resistant, in contrast to the eclecticism marking his artistic vision and practice. His perceived ideological compulsion to critique European civilisation in terms of an Indian antitype often blinded him to the dialogic, as opposed to monolithic, quality in European literature of successive ages, to Europe's powerful tradition of self-criticism. Imperfect parallels and underlying influences of either Romanticism or Modernism may well be sought in other texts of Tagore's, notwithstanding his professed reservations about such foreign cultural and literary movements. In terms of an overarching ideology for reading Tagore, who was neither quintessentially Indian nor Bengali, neither exclusively Modern nor pre-modern, in his spatio-temporal, socio-cultural moorings, this essay argues that Tagore studies can be revitalised only through a cautious deployment of the Western theoretical apparatus, Western academic practice, and through an openminded, inclusive readiness to seek aesthetic parallels in world literature.

On the other hand, it speaks volumes for the enduring modernity of a text like *The Unfortunate Traveller* that it should, no less than Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* which it does not acknowledge as a model, have prefigured traits that may then be convincingly located in texts written centuries later and in other worlds. And it speaks no less eloquently for the enduring originality of Bakhtin's theory of generic paradigms that one should be able to read Tagore's *Shey* along its lines. Without simplifying the

specificities of their respective historical contexts, the perceived intersection of these three writers in this essay, however anachronistic, could perhaps be justified in terms of Tagore's very own construct 'World Literature' – 'Visva-sahitya'.

It has not been the purpose of my article to label *Shey* as post-Romantic, post-Modernist, post-colonial, or even 'carnavalesque'. Such an exercise would be utterly at odds with the viscerally anti-intellectual spirit of the text. In so far as the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque has been used consistently, the objective has been to open up the text to its inherent possibilities rather than to brand it indelibly. The endeavour has been to show how this unique literary pastiche, unquestionably without a peer in the rest of Tagore's vast oeuvre, is relentlessly redefining itself within its own framework and relentlessly provoking the reader to adjust his understanding accordingly.

NOTES:

1. Cf. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 179.
2. John Milton, *Areopagitica* (The Project Gutenberg of Areopagitica), accessed on 29 March 2011, www.gutenberg.org/files/608/608-h/608-h.htm
3. Tagore, *My Pictures*, 64: "The joy in a picture is a joy of a perfect sense of proportion. The restraint of lines makes the picture distinct and definite. To see it is to see the thing itself – whatever it may be, a piece of stone, a donkey, a cactus, an old woman – it does not matter what. Whenever and wherever we envision a thing as true we touch the infinite and that is an endless joy." (Written to Nirmal Kumari Mahalanobis, 29 November 1928.)
4. Rabindranath Tagore, *Lectures and Addresses*, 93: "We have said before that where there is an element of the superfluous in our heart's relationship with the world, Art has its birth. In other words, where our personality feels its wealth it breaks out in display. What we devour ourselves for is totally spent. What overflows our need becomes articulate. ..."
5. Translation mine.

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অগ্নিভ ঘোষ

অবচেতনার অবদান:

রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও বিশ শতকের বাঙলা সাহিত্যসরে মনঃসমীক্ষণ

একটি মুদ্রিত সমাপতন

খ্রিস্টীয় ১৯০০ অব্দ। যুগপৎ লিপজিগ ও ভিয়েনা থেকে প্রকাশিত হল একটি জার্মান গ্রন্থ, শিরোনাম, *Die Traumdeutung*। বইয়ের আখ্যাপত্রে প্রায় ঘোষণার মতো মুদ্রিত ছিল ভার্জিলের একটি পঙ্ক্তি, ‘Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo’। Flectere দেবভূমি; আর Acheron সেই নদী, যে জীবিত ও মৃতের জগতের মাঝে সীমারেখা হয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে। খেরনের খেয়ায় আখেরন পার করলেই মৃতের জগত। সারকথা ভার্জিল-বাক্যের “স্বর্গকে যদি টেনে নামাতে না-ই পারি তবে নরককেই ঠেলে উপরে তুলবো।”

নভেম্বর ১৮৯৯-এই ছাপা হয় গিয়েছিল এই বই। কিন্তু প্রকাশকের ভাবী শতাব্দীর উদ্দেশ্যে এ গ্রন্থ নিবেদনের একান্ত ইচ্ছায় আখ্যাপত্রে প্রকাশ সাল হিসেবে মুদ্রিত হল ১৯০০ অব্দ। জার্মান ভাষায় অনভিজ্ঞ পাঠককে অবশ্য অপেক্ষা করতে হয়েছিল আরও অনেকগুলো বছর গ্রন্থটির ইংরেজি অনুবাদের জন্য। ১৯১৩-তে A. A. Brill-এর সযত্ন অনুবাদে যুগপৎ লন্ডন ও ন্যুইয়র্ক থেকে প্রকাশিত হয় গ্রন্থটির ইংরেজি তর্জমা, শিরোনাম—*The Interpretation of Dreams*।

প্রথম জার্মান সংস্করণের ভূমিকায় গ্রন্থকর্তা সিগমুন্ড ফ্রয়েড (১৮৫৬-১৯৩৯) জানান যে তাঁর এই স্বপ্ন-ব্যাখ্যান পদ্ধতির উপস্থাপনে তিনি সচেতন ভাবেই neuro-pathology বা স্নায়ুবিকারবিদ্যার সীমার মধ্যে নিজেকে আবদ্ধ রাখলেও এমন এক সমস্যার সম্মুখীন হতে হয়েছে তাঁকে যা সাধারণত ‘বিজ্ঞান-লেখকদের’ হতে হয় না। জানান তিনি, এ পদ্ধতির প্রাঞ্জল অলঙ্করণের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় উদাহরণ তাঁকে সংগ্রহ করতে হয়েছে হয় তাঁর নিজের স্বপ্ন থেকে, অথবা তাঁর নব আবিষ্কৃত

মনঃসমীক্ষণ পদ্ধতিতে তাঁরই চিকিৎসাধীন রোগীদের স্বপ্ন থেকে। এতে সমস্যা এই, উদাহরণগুলির ব্যাখ্যায় তাঁকে বাধ্যতাই, না চাইলেও, জনসমক্ষে উন্মুক্ত করতে হয়েছে তাঁর নিভৃত মানসিক জীবনের এমন অনেক সত্য যা সাধারণত যাঁরা ‘কবি নন’ (ফ্রয়েড, ১৯০০), নেহাতই বিজ্ঞানের-লেখক, তাঁদের ব্যক্ত করতে হয় না। নিজের নিভৃত মনের গোপন সত্য তাঁর মতো বিজ্ঞানের জগতের লেখকরা উদ্ঘাটনে নারাজ হলেও কবির যে তা নন এমনটাই যেন ফ্রয়েডের বলবার অভিপ্রায়, অন্তত ‘কবি নন’ শব্দ-যুগল আমাদের এমনটাই ভাবতে বাধ্য করে।

ফ্রয়েডের এ ধারণাকে যেন ভেঙে দিতেই, ওই একই বছর, ১৯০০ সালে, বাষট্টিটি কবিতা বিশিষ্ট এক তরুী কাব্যগ্রন্থের দশম কবিতা রূপে, কলকাতা থেকে আত্মপ্রকাশ করে এক বাঙালি কবির একটি কবিতা।

‘অচেনা’ শিরোনামী সে কবিতায় কবি জানান—আমরা যে কেউ কারও ভেতরের খবর জানি না, কেউ কাউকে আসলে চিনি না, সেটা একটা ‘মস্ত বাঁচন’, যদি সত্যি আমরা পরস্পরকে জানতাম তা হলে জগত জুড়ে ‘তুর্কি নাচন’ লেগে যেত। তাই জগত সুস্থ রাখতে কবির নিদান—

বুকের মধ্যে মনটা থাকে
মনের মধ্যে চিন্তা,—
সেইখানেতেই নিজের ডিমে
সদাই তিনি দিন তা!

বাইরের জগতের নিয়মকানুন সমঝে নিতে তিনি প্রস্তুত, কিন্তু অন্তরের খবর তিনি অন্তর্যামীরা জন্যই তুলে রাখতে চান। মনের গতি প্রকৃতি সম্পর্কেও তিনি সচেতন; তিনি জানেন গোপন তার চাল, স্বাধীন তার ইচ্ছা, তাই যেন তিনি নিজেকে সাবধান করে বলেন—

কে যাবে ভাই মনের মধ্যে
মনের কথা ধর্তে?
কীটের খোঁজে কে দেবে হাত
কেউটে সাপের গর্তে?

কবিতার ধ্রুবপদে বারংবার ফিরে আসে মনের প্রতি কবির সাবধানবাণী—

চাইনে মন চাইনে!
মুখের মধ্যে যেটুকু পাই,

যে হাসি আর যে কথাটাই,

যে কলা আর যে ছলনাই

তাই নে রে, মন, তাই নে। (ঠাকুর, ১৩০৭ [১৯০০], ৩৭)

বঙ্গাব্দ ১৩০৭, আর খ্রিষ্টাব্দ ১৯০০। কলকাতা থেকে প্রকাশিত বাষট্টিটি কবিতা বিশিষ্ট সে কাব্যগ্রন্থের নাম, *ক্ষণিক*। বলার অপেক্ষা না থাকলেও বলি, কবির নাম রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর (১৮৬১-১৯৪১)। বঙ্কু প্রিয়নাথ সেনকে ২৯শে বৈশাখ ১৩০৭, এক চিঠিতে কবি লিখছেন—

ক্ষণিকার জন্য তাড়া লাগিয়ে হয়রান্ হলুম—নেপথ্য-বিধানেই বসন্তের রাত্রি কেটে গেল—আমার নটী যখন রঙ্গভূমিতে প্রবেশ করবেন, তখন বাদলের দৌরাণ্ডে তার বাসন্তী রঙের অতি—ফুরফুরে উত্তরীয়াটির বাহার থাকে কি না থাকে। দক্ষিণ বাতাসের মধ্যে ঐকে না বের করতে পারলে অন্যায় হবে। (ঠাকুর, ১৯৬৩ [১৩৭০], ১০৬)

কবির সন্দেহকে সার্থক করেই ‘বাদলের দৌরাণ্ডে’, ভরা শ্রাবণেই প্রকাশিত হল *ক্ষণিক*। সমগ্র কাব্যগ্রন্থের মাত্র দুটি কবিতা, ‘ক্ষণিকের গান’ ও ‘নববর্ষা’, ব্যতীত কোনও কবিতাই ইতিপূর্বে প্রকাশিত হয়নি কোথাও। এ বইতেই ছাপার হরফে তাদের প্রথম আত্মপ্রকাশ।

একটি নেহাত ‘ব্যক্তিগত’ সাক্ষাৎ

একই সময়ে এমন আপাত বিপরীত ভাবনায় ভাবিত যে দুই ভাবুক, কেমন হয়, যদি তাদের ‘মুখোমুখি বসিবার’ আয়োজন করা যায় এক বার? রঙ্গ-প্রিয়দের রঙ্গ-পিপাসা মেটাতেই যেন এর প্রায় ছাব্বিশ বছর পর ২৫ অক্টোবর ১৯২৬, ভিয়েনায় সাক্ষাৎ হয় দুজনের—সিগমুন্ড ফ্রয়েড আর রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর। সে বারের ইউরোপ যাত্রায় হাঙ্গেরির পথে, তিন রাত্রি ভিয়েনায় কাটান রবীন্দ্রনাথ; নিবাস, হোটেল ইম্পেরিয়াল, ভিয়েনা; সঙ্গী, তাঁর দীর্ঘ দিনের সুহৃদ ও সে যাত্রার আপ্ত সহায়ক প্রশান্তচন্দ্র মহলানবীশ (১৮৯৩-১৯৭২), আর তাঁর স্ত্রী নির্মলকুমারী। রবীন্দ্রনাথের অনুরোধে প্রশান্তচন্দ্রই নাকি সপরিবার নিমন্ত্রণ করেন ফ্রয়েডকে; আর সে নিমন্ত্রণে সাড়া দিয়ে সিগমুন্ড, সে সন্ধ্যায়, স্ত্রী মার্থা (১৮৬১-১৯৫১) ও কন্যা আনাকে (১৮৯৫-১৯৮২) নিয়ে হাজির হন সোজা ইম্পেরিয়াল হোটেলে।

ঠিক কী কথা হয়েছিল দুজনের? আশ্চর্য ভাবেই, ভাবের আদান-প্রদান নথিবদ্ধ করতে সদা আগ্রহী রবীন্দ্রনাথ, এ সংলাপ নথিবদ্ধ করার কোনো প্রয়াস-ই করেন না। তার চেয়েও অবাক লাগে, তাঁর পরবর্তী পনেরো বছরের জীবদ্দশায়, এই সাক্ষাৎ বিষয়ে তাঁকে সম্পূর্ণ নিশ্চুপ থাকতে দেখে। এমনকি যখন ভারতীয় মনঃসমীক্ষকের সমীক্ষণের আওতাধীন তাঁর কাব্য, আর সে নব বিজ্ঞানের ছায়ায় নিজের কাব্যকে দেখতে ঠিক কেমন লাগছে কবির, সে প্রতিক্রিয়া সরাসরি জেনে নিতে সমীক্ষক স্বয়ং সপার্ষদ হাজির হয়েছেন কবির ডেরায়, তখনও, কবি এ সাক্ষাৎ বিষয়ে নীরব।

এ সাক্ষাতের প্রমাণ অবশ্য রয়ে যায় নির্মলকুমারীর ভ্রমণবৃত্তান্তে এবং প্রশান্তচন্দ্র গৃহীত দুটি আলোকচিত্রে। নির্মলকুমারী, *কবির সঙ্গে যুরোপে* (১৯৬৯ [১৩৭৬]) নামের ভ্রমণকাহিনীতে ফ্রয়েড, প্রশান্তচন্দ্র ও তাঁর পূর্ব-সাক্ষাতের এক মজাদার বিবরণ পেশ করে জানান—

ফ্রয়েড কবির সঙ্গে একবার দেখা করবার ইচ্ছে প্রকাশ করেছিলেন, তাই আমরা দ্বিতীয়বার যখন ভিয়েনা যাই (১৯২৬), তখন রবীন্দ্রনাথ একদিন ফ্রয়েডকে চায়ে নেমস্তম্ভ করলেন। ভদ্রলোক সেদিন চা খেতে এসে আমাদের হোটেলে অনেকক্ষণ কাটিয়েছিলেন। আমার স্বামী রবীন্দ্রনাথের সাথে তাঁর বসে কথা বলার একটা ছবিও তুলে নিয়েছিলেন। (বসু, ২০০৮, ১৩৪)

ফ্রয়েড-এর প্রতিক্রিয়া অবশ্য পাওয়া যায়। তাঁর-ই চিকিৎসাধীন অ্যানা ভন্ ভেস্ট-কে লিখিত ১৪ অক্টোবর ১৯২৬-এর এক পত্রে স্পষ্ট ধরা পড়ে ফ্রয়েডের বিস্মিত মুগ্ধতা—

Tagore invited us to pay him a visit on 25th October [1926]. We found him ailing and tired, but he is a wonderful sight, he actually looks like we imagined the Lord God looks, but only about 10,000 years older than the way Michelangelo painted him in the Sistine. (Biswas, 2008, 55)

একটু অন্য স্বরে আর এক বার এক সাক্ষাৎকারের উল্লেখ করেন ফ্রয়েড তাঁর মনঃসমীক্ষণ প্রকল্পের সহযোগী, বঙ্কু সান্দোর ফ্রেঞ্জি-কে (১৮৭৩-১৯৩৩) লিখিত ডিসেম্বর ১৩, ১৯২৬-এর এক পত্রে—

I have had so little occasion to write to you that I don't know what I have already and what I haven't yet told you. Eg, that

অবচেতনার অবদান: রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও বিশ শতকের বাঙলা সাহিত্যসরে মনঃসমীক্ষণ/113

on October, 25 I called upon Tagore about his request; that last week, another Indian, Das Gupta, a philosopher from Calcutta, was with me-my quote of Indians has been filled for quite a long time. (Biswas, 2008, 56)

কিন্তু এই সময়ান্তরী আপাত-বিরোধী দুই প্রতিক্রিয়া থেকে অনুমান করা অসম্ভব, ঠিক কী কথা হয়েছিল দুজনের?

অমরেন্দ্রনাথ বসু, (১৯১২-) এক বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষক, সামান্য রেখে ঢেকে প্রশ্নটা করেই ফেলেছিলেন, তবে এ ঘটনার অনেক পরে, ১৯৭৯ সালে। তখন সে সাক্ষাতের প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীদের মধ্যে জীবিত মাত্র দুজন—নির্মলকুমারী মহলানবীশ ও আনা ফ্রয়েড। অমরেন্দ্রনাথের কৌতূহলী পত্রের সাড়া দেন তাঁরা দুজনেই। নির্মলকুমারী তাঁর পত্রের উত্তরে জানান

তাদের কি কি কথাবার্তা হয়েছিল তা কিছুই জানি না বা কোনো রেকর্ড নেই। কারণ ওঁদের দুজনকে চা খেতে দিয়ে আমরা অন্য ঘরে চলে গিয়েছিলাম; ওঁদের কথাবার্তার সময় বিনা কারণে বসে থাকাটা ভদ্রতা নয় বলে; কাজেই কথাবার্তার রেকর্ড কি করে থাকবে? (বসু, ২০০৮, ১৫৩)

আর আনা এ সাক্ষাৎ প্রসঙ্গে জানান,

I myself was very fond of Tagore's writing and also very impressed by his person, but evidently my father was not as much taken by his personality. I cannot tell you the reason, I could only guess that it was the romantic element which did not appeal to him as it did to me. (বসু, ২০০৮, ১৩৩)

রবীন্দ্রনাথের ভাবনার রোমান্টিক প্রবণতা কি ফ্রয়েডের ভাবনার এতটাই বিপ্রতীপ যে, জল-তেলের মতই তাদের মিলবার সম্ভাবনা অলীক স্বপ্নবিলাস মাত্র?

কয়েকটি চমকপ্রদ মিল

আশ্চর্য করে ফ্রয়েড ও রবীন্দ্রনাথের নানান ধারণার কিছু চমকপ্রদ আপাত মিল। মিল আপাত মাত্রই, কেননা, ফ্রয়েডীয় রচনা পত্রের সঙ্গে রবীন্দ্রনাথের পরিচয় যৎসামান্য ছিল বললেও বেশি বলা হয়। রবীন্দ্রনাথের যে সব লেখায় ফ্রয়েডীয় ধারণার প্রতিধ্বনি শুনি আমরা, এবং শুনে পুলকিত হই, তাদের

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অনেকগুলিরই প্রকাশ এমনকি *Die Traumdeutung*-এর প্রথম সংস্করণেরও (১৮৯৯/১৯০০) অনেক আগে।

১২৯০ বঙ্গাব্দের চৈত্রের (মার্চ-এপ্রিল ১৮৮৩) ভারতী-তে প্রকাশিত 'বিবিধ প্রসঙ্গ'-এর, ধর্ম শিরোনামি রচনার পঞ্চম স্তবকে লেখেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ,

আমরা যতখানি অচেতন, ততখানি সচেতন নহি ইহা নিশ্চয়ই।... আমাদের মনে যে কী আছে তাহা অতি যৎসামান্য পরিমাণে আমরা জানি মাত্র, যাহা জানি না তাহাই অগাধ। কিন্তু যাহা জানি না তাহাও যে আছে ইহা অনেকেই বিশ্বাস করিতে চাহেন না। (ঠাকুর, চৈত্র ১২৯০/মার্চ-এপ্রিল ১৮৮৩, ৬৮)

ঐ একই লেখায় এর পরেই আসে স্মৃতি-বিস্মৃতি প্রসঙ্গ,

আমাদের স্মরণশক্তি অতি ক্ষুদ্র, বিস্মৃতি অতিশয় বৃহৎ। কিন্তু বিস্মৃতি অর্থে তো বিনাশ বুঝায় না। স্মৃতি-বিস্মৃতি একই জাতি। একই স্থানে বাস করে।... বিস্মৃতির বিকাশকেই বলে স্মৃতি, কিন্তু স্মৃতির অভাবকেই যে বিস্মৃতি বলে তাহা নহে। এই অতি বিপুল বিস্মৃতি আমাদের মনের মধ্যে বাস করিতেছে। বাস করিতেছে মানে কী নিদ্রিত আছে? তাহা নহে। অবিশ্রাম কাজ করিতেছে, এবং কোনো কোনোটা স্মৃতিরূপে পরিস্ফুট হইয়া উঠিতেছে। (ঠাকুর, চৈত্র ১২৯০/মার্চ-এপ্রিল ১৮৮৩, ৬৮)

১০ই অক্টোবর ১৮৯০, লন্ডন থেকে ভ্রাতুষ্পুত্রী ইন্দিরা দেবীকে একটি চিঠিতে লেখেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ,

মানুষের মনের এত বিচিত্র এবং বিস্মৃত কাণ্ডকারখানা—তার এত দিকে গতি—এবং এত রকমের অধিকার যে, এ-দিকে ও-দিকে হেলতেই হবে। সেই তার জীবনের লক্ষণ, তার মনুষ্যত্বের চিহ্ন, তার জড়ত্বের প্রতিবাদ। এই দ্বিধা, এই দুর্বলতা যার নেই তার মন নিতান্ত সংকীর্ণ এবং কঠিন এবং জীবনবিহীন। যাকে আমরা প্রবৃত্তি বলি এবং যার প্রতি সর্বদাই কটুভাষা প্রয়োগ করি সেই আমাদের জীবনের গতিশক্তি—সেই আমাদের নানা সুখদুঃখ পাপপুণ্যের মধ্যে দিয়ে অনন্তের দিকে বিকশিত করে তুলছে। (ঠাকুর, ১৯৯২ [১৩৯৯], ২৬)

১৩০০ বঙ্গাব্দের শ্রাবণে (জুলাই-আগস্ট ১৮৯৩) সাধনা পত্রিকায় 'অখণ্ডতা' নামের পঞ্চভৌতিক আলোচনায় সমীর বলেছিলেন,

মানুষের অন্তঃকরণের দুই অংশ আছে। একটা অচেতন, বৃহৎ, গুপ্ত এবং নিশ্চেষ্ট, আর একটা সচেতন, সক্রিয়, চঞ্চল, পরিবর্তনশীল। যেমন মহাদেশ ও সমুদ্র। সমুদ্র চঞ্চলভাবে যাহা-কিছু সঞ্চয় করিতেছে, ত্যাগ করিতেছে, গোপন-তলদেশে তাহাই দৃঢ় নিশ্চল আকারে উত্তরোত্তর রাশীকৃত হইয়া উঠিতেছে। সেইরূপ আমাদের চেতনা প্রতিদিন যাহা-কিছু আনিতেছে, ফেলিতেছে, সেই-সমস্ত ক্রমে সংস্কার স্মৃতি অভ্যাস আকারে একটি বৃহৎ গোপন আধারে অচেতন ভাবে সঞ্চিত হইয়া উঠিতেছে। তাহাই আমাদের জীবনের ও চরিত্রের স্থায়ী ভিত্তি। (<http://www.rabindra-rachanabali.nltr.org/node/7545>)

রবীন্দ্রনাথের বিজ্ঞানের প্রতি ও ফ্রয়েডের কবিতার প্রতি অপরিসীম আগ্রহ এবং উপলব্ধির এ হেন সায়ুজ্য স্বত্ত্বেও ফ্রয়েডের মনে ধরল না ‘রোমান্টিক’ রবীন্দ্রনাথ? আর রবীন্দ্রনাথও নিরাসক্ত ও উদাসীন থেকে গেলেন ফ্রয়েড-আবিষ্কৃত বিজ্ঞান পদ্ধতির প্রতি?

বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষকের আত্মসংস্কারে রবীন্দ্র-রচনা

ফ্রয়েডের সাথে সাক্ষাৎ বিষয়ে নীরব থাকতে সক্ষম হলেও মনঃসমীক্ষণ বিষয়ে নীরব থাকা রবীন্দ্রনাথের হল না। ১৯২২-এই ইন্টারন্যাশনাল সাইকো-অ্যানালিটিকাল অ্যাসোসিয়েশনের অনুমোদন নিয়ে যাত্রা শুরু করেছিল গিরীন্দ্রশেখর বসু প্রতিষ্ঠিত ভারতীয় মনঃসমীক্ষণ সমিতি; উদ্দেশ্য ভারতীয়দের মধ্যে মনঃসমীক্ষণের “প্রচার ও প্রসার”। সমিতির বেশ কিছু সদস্য আগ্রহী হয়ে উঠেছিলেন সাহিত্যকর্মের মনঃসমীক্ষণে। ১৯১৩-তে নোবেল প্রাপ্তির পর থেকেই বাঙালি সব বিষয়েই টেনে নামায় রবীন্দ্রনাথের নাম। এ ক্ষেত্রেও তার ব্যত্যয় ঘটলো না। বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষক সাহিত্যের মনঃসমীক্ষণে প্রয়াসী হয়ে সর্বাগ্রে টেনে নামালেন সেই রবীন্দ্র-রচনা।

১৯২৬-এ তৎকালীন বোম্বে, অধুনা মুম্বাই শহরে অনুষ্ঠিত হল ত্রয়োদশ ইন্ডিয়ান সায়েন্স কংগ্রেস। এ বছরই প্রথম সায়েন্স কংগ্রেসের অন্তর্ভুক্ত হল “সাইকোলজি”র একটি স্বতন্ত্র বিভাগ। এ বছরের সায়েন্স কংগ্রেসের প্রসিডিংস-এ দেখা যায় যে, প্রথম বছরই এই বিভাগে উপস্থাপিত নিবন্ধ সমূহের একটি, সরসীলাল সরকার (১৮৭৪-১৯৪৪)-এর A Study of Imagery In The Works of Rabindranath Tagore (Proceedings of The Thirteenth Indian Science Congress, 1926, 356)। বাংলাভাষায় মুদ্রিত প্রথম আত্মজীবনী রচনার দাবীটা

রবীন্দ্রনাথের পিতা দেবেন্দ্রনাথের (১৮১৭-১৯০৫) হাত থেকে ছিনিয়ে নিয়েছিলেন যিনি, সেই রাসসুন্দরী দেবীর (১৮০৯-১৮৯৯) পৌত্র সরসীলাল। ১৯২৮-এর আগস্ট সংখ্যায় *The Calcutta Review* প্রকাশ করেন পূর্ণাঙ্গ নিবন্ধটি, শিরোনাম ঈষৎ পরিবর্তিত, ‘A Peculiarity in The Imagery in Dr. Rabindranath Tagore’s Poems’। আর তার আগের বছরই, অগ্রহায়ণ ১৩৩৪-এর (নভেম্বর ১৯২৭) *মানসী ও মন্মথবাণী* প্রকাশ করলো অনিলচন্দ্র বসু (১৯০১-১৯২৯) কৃত সে নিবন্ধের বঙ্গানুবাদ, ‘রবীন্দ্র-কাব্য পরিকল্পনার একটি বিশেষত্ব’।

প্রবন্ধটির মূল বক্তব্য রবীন্দ্রনাথের সমগ্র লেখায় নাকি ফিরে ফিরে আসে তিনটি প্রতীক—প্রথম তাল, তারপর গান, আর সব শেষে গতি। এই প্রতীকের বারংবার ফিরে আসার স্বরূপ সন্ধান করতে সরসীলাল টেনে আনেন ফ্রয়েডকে, “ডাক্তার ফ্রয়েড বলেন, মনের যে স্তর থেকে স্বপ্নের উৎপত্তি, কবিতারও উৎপত্তি সেই স্তর থেকে।” (বসু, ২০০৮, ৯৫) “Dr. Freud” নাকি “একখানি পুস্তকে” বলেছেন,

What today is symbolically connected was probably in primeval times united in a conceptual and linguistic identity. The symbolic relationship seems to be the remains and sign of an identity which once existed. (বসু, ২০০৮, ১০৫)

সেই “once existed” “identity”-কে সরসীলাল খুঁজে পান উপনিষদের মধ্যে। অজিত চক্রবর্তীর ঔপনিষদিক ঋষি রবীন্দ্রনাথকে ফ্রয়েডের শিলমোহর লাগিয়ে আর একবার প্রতিষ্ঠার চেষ্টা করেন তিনি। দাবী তাঁর,

“শাস্ত্রম শিবমদ্বৈতম” উপনিষদের একটি মন্ত্র। এই মন্ত্র কি ভাবে অবচেতনের ভিতর দিয়া কবির রচনায় তাল, গান ও গতির ভিতর মূর্তি পরিগ্রহ করিয়াছে... তাহাই দেখাইতে চেষ্টা করিয়াছি। (সরকার, ১৯৪১ [১৩৪৮], ১২৭)

লেখাটি দৃষ্টিগোচর হয়েছিল রবীন্দ্রনাথের, এবং তা হয়েছিল সে নিবন্ধের মূল বা অনুবাদ কোনোটাই মুদ্রিত হওয়ার আগে। ২৯ মে ১৯২৭, একটি ব্যক্তিগত চিঠিতে রবীন্দ্রনাথ লিখছেন,

সরসীলাল কবিতাকে যে দিক থেকে যাচাই করতে চান সেদিক থেকে সজীব কবিতার সন্ধান পাওয়া যায় না। বন্ধুকে যদি শরীরতত্ত্ব রূপে বিচার করি তবে শরীরতত্ত্ব মিলতেও পারে কিন্তু বন্ধু থাকেন কোথায়? কবিতার পরিচয় তার রসে, সেটাকে পাই রসের দ্বারা, বিশ্লেষণের দ্বারা নয়। প্রথমে তাল, তারপরে গান, তারপরে

গতি, কবিতার এ পর্যায়ের কোনো মানোই নেই। সমস্তটা জড়িয়ে ও একটা অখণ্ড জিনিস। (ঠাকুর, ১৯৯২/১৩৯৯, ১২৪)।

এ পত্রের প্রাপক, এম. সি. সরকার এন্ড সন্স-এর প্রতিষ্ঠাতা মহিমচন্দ্র সরকারের (১৮৫২-১৯১৮) কন্যা ও *মৌচাক* সম্পাদক সুধীরচন্দ্র সরকারের (১৮৯২-১৯৬৮) সহোদরা কাদম্বিনী (১২৮৫-১৩৫০)। সরসীলালের ভগিনী নির্ঝরিনী সরকার (১৮৯৪-১৯৬৩) আর কাদম্বিনী বাল্যসখী। অনুমান করা যায় যে দাদার সায়েন্স কংগ্রেসে পঠিত নিবন্ধটি নির্ঝরিনী-ই তাঁর বাঙ্কবীকে পড়তে দিয়েছিলেন।

রবীন্দ্রনাথের এই ব্যক্তিগত প্রতিক্রিয়া সরসীলালের জানার কথা নয়, ফলত তিনি তাঁর নিবন্ধের অনুবাদক অনিলকুমার বসুকে নিয়ে সোজা হাজির হন রবীন্দ্রনাথের কাছে; উদ্দেশ্য, কবির প্রতিক্রিয়া প্রত্যক্ষ করা। রবীন্দ্রনাথ, সরসীলাল ও অনিলচন্দ্রের সে সংলাপ, ‘রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও মনোবিশ্লেষণ’ শিরোনামে, অনিলকুমার কর্তৃক অনুলিখিত হয়ে, প্রকাশিত হল জুন ১৯২৮ [আষাঢ় ১৩৩৫]-এর *প্রবাসী* পত্রিকায়। আসুন পাঠক, মনঃসমীক্ষক, সরসীলাল ও তাঁর অনুগামী অনিলচন্দ্রের উপস্থিতি এক ফাঁটাও বিস্মৃত না হয়ে, শুধুমাত্র তাঁদের প্রতি-উক্তিকে আপাত স্থগিত রেখে, সে সংলাপ থেকে আমরা হেঁকে নিই ‘মনোবিশ্লেষণ’ বা ‘সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিস’-এর প্রতি কবির প্রত্যক্ষ প্রতিক্রিয়া। রবীন্দ্রনাথেরই জবানিতে ক্রমান্বয়ে সে সংলাপের সারটুকু আপনাদের জন্য সাজিয়ে দিলাম—

তোমরা আমায় Psycho-analysis-এর মধ্যে টেনে এনে মহা মুন্সিলেই ফেলেছো, আমি তো ওর কিছুই বুঝতে পারিনে। তা ছাড়া তোমরা তোমাদের নিজেদের অন্তর্দৃষ্টি নিয়ে বুঝি কিছু দেখতে শেখনি? যা ফ্রয়েড বলছে, তাই একেবারে শিরোধার্য করে চলেছো? আমরা যে স্বাধীনভাবে চিন্তা করবার শক্তি হারিয়ে বসেছি, সে কথা অস্বীকার করবার উপায় নেই।

...Freud-এর School এর সঙ্গে এইখানেই আমার প্রধান ঝগড়া। আমি বলি, Sex-instinct একেবারে গোড়ার কথা নয়। আরও গোড়ার কথা হচ্ছে Self-assertion, এই শেষোক্ত instinct Sex-instinct অপেক্ষা বেশি পুরাতন এবং ওতপ্রোতভাবে আমাদের জীবনের উপর প্রভাব বিস্তার করে রেখেছে। মানুষ জন্মাবার সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই অহংজ্ঞান (Ego Consciousness) নিয়ে জন্মেছে। প্রতি পদে এই Ego নিজেকে assert করতে চাইছে, হয়তো প্রতিপদে বিফলও হচ্ছে।

...জগতের সব বড় কাব্যসৃষ্টি তো আর কেবল ballads এবং love lyrics নয়, সুতরাং কেমন করে বলবো যে, তাদের মূলও সুতরাং Sex-instinct? যেমন

ধর Milton-এর Paradise Lost। একে যে Sex-instinct-এর পরিণত বিকাশ বলে গণ্য করা যায় এরূপ মনে হয় না।

...সাধারণ বিজ্ঞানে যে সকল বিষয় গবেষণা দ্বারা সিদ্ধান্ত করা হয়, তার উপাদানগুলিতে একটা কিছু definiteness থাকে যা পরিমাণ করা যায়, বা নির্দিষ্ট করা যায়। তোমার Psycho-analysis-এর প্রধান উপাদান স্বপ্ন। এই উপাদানগুলিকে কি সাধারণ বিজ্ঞানের উপাদানগুলোর মত নির্দিষ্টভাবে পরিমাণ করা যেতে পারে?

...উপনিষদের এই মন্ত্র আমারও জীবনের মূল মন্ত্র। এই মন্ত্র নিয়ে ‘শান্তিনিকেতন’ পত্রিকায় বহুবার অনেক কথাই লিখেছি। সুতরাং ইহার আভাষ যে আমার কবিতাগুলোর মধ্যেও থাকবে তা কিছুই বিচিত্র নয়। তবে আমি যে সর্বদাই এই মন্ত্র স্মরণ করে লিখে গেছি, একথা মনে করলে ভুল করা হবে।

...mystic যে শুধু আমি তা নয়, অল্পবিস্তর সব কবিই mystic। এই mysticism বুঝাতে আমি genius-এর কথা বলব। Genius-এর মধ্যে দুটা element থাকে; তার একটি universal, অপরটি unique এবং individual। (বসু, ১৯২৮, ৩৪০-৩৪৩)

শেষ অবধি বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষকের হাত থেকে বাঁচতে ইউনিক-ইন্ডিভিজুয়াল ও ইউনিভার্সাল-এর মিশেলে গড়া জিনিয়াসের বর্মকেই ঢাল হিসেবে বাছলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। কিন্তু এতেও শেষ রক্ষা হল না। ঠিক এর পরের সংখ্যা, অর্থাৎ শ্রাবণ ১৩৩৫ (জুলাই-আগস্ট ১৯২৮)-এর *প্রবাসী*-তে পুনরায় ‘রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও মনোবিশ্লেষণ’ শিরোনামে একটি লেখার প্রকাশ লক্ষ্য করেন *প্রবাসী*-র পাঠককুল। তবে রবীন্দ্রনাথের কোনো প্রত্যক্ষ উপস্থিতি নেই এ লেখায়। লেখক, ভারতীয় মনঃসমীক্ষণ সমিতির প্রতিষ্ঠাতা ও সভাপতি, স্বয়ং গিরীন্দ্রশেখর বসু।

প্রবন্ধের গোড়াতেই গিরীন্দ্রশেখর জানিয়ে দেন যে গত আষাঢ় সংখ্যায় ‘রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও মনোবিশ্লেষণ’ শীর্ষক প্রবন্ধে সরসীলাল ও রবীন্দ্রনাথ এমন সব কথা বলেছেন বলে লেখা হয়েছে যার সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিসের সাথে কোনই সম্পর্ক নেই। (বসু, শ্রাবণ ১৩৩৫/জুলাই-আগস্ট ১৯২৮) জানান গিরীন্দ্রশেখর, সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিস মনের ‘অজ্ঞাত প্রদেশে’ যে সব ব্যাপার ঘটে চলে তারই আলোচনা করে। মনের জ্ঞাতসারে যে সব ভাব বা চিন্তা উদয় হয় তাঁর গুরুত্বকে গিরীন্দ্রশেখর অগ্রাহ্য করেন না। তবে তাঁর মতে “এই মনোবৃত্তিগুলির আলোচনা মনোবিদ্যার অন্তর্গত। সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিসের ইহার সহিত কোন প্রত্যক্ষ সম্বন্ধ নাই।” (বসু, শ্রাবণ ১৩৩৫/

জুলাই-আগস্ট ১৯২৮,) জানান তিনি যে সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিস শুধু মনের অজ্ঞাত প্রদেশে অর্থাৎ নির্জন লুকিয়ে থাকা ইচ্ছাকেই ‘সম্যক আলোচনা’র দ্বারা নির্ণয় করেন, এবং যে মুহূর্তে কোন ইচ্ছা নির্জন থেকে সজ্ঞানে চলে আসে, অর্থাৎ আর মনের অগোচরে থাকে না সে মুহূর্তে তা সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিসের আগ্রহের সীমার বাইরে চলে যায়। গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের মতে ‘নির্জন-মনোবিদ’ যদি কারুর মনের ‘অজ্ঞাত প্রদেশে’ কোন ‘কু-ইচ্ছা’ দেখতে পান এবং সে যদি তা অস্বীকার করে তবে ‘নির্জন-মনোবিদ’ তারিণী কবিরাজের মতোই বলেন, “হয়, হয়, জানিতি পার না।” (বসু, শ্রাবণ ১৩৩৫/জুলাই-আগস্ট ১৯২৮,)

সরসীলাল ও রবীন্দ্রনাথ প্রতি সাইকোঅ্যানালিস্ট গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের স্পষ্ট অভিযোগ যে তাঁরা দুজনেই সংজ্ঞান ও নির্জনের পার্থক্য ভুলে কথা বলেছেন আর সে কারণেই সাইকোঅ্যানালিসিস বিষয়ে তাঁদের মত গ্রাহ্য নয়। সর্বোপরি গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের দাবী,

সরসীবাবুর প্রবন্ধ ‘A Peculiarity in The Imagery in Dr. Rabindranath Tagore’s Poems’ সাইকো-অ্যানালিটিক্যাল নহে, তাহা সাইকোলজিক্যাল মাত্র। অজ্ঞাত মনের কোনো প্রামাণিক আলোচনাই ইহাতে নাই। আমি যতদূর জানি ভারতবর্ষে কাব্য ও আর্ট-সম্বন্ধে সাইকো-অ্যানালিসিসের দিক হইতে প্রথম আলোচনা অধ্যাপক শ্রীযুক্ত রজনী হালদার মহাশয়ই করেন। তাঁহার প্রবন্ধ ইন্ডিয়ান সাইকো-অ্যানালিটিক্যাল সোসাইটিতে ও ইন্ডিয়ান সায়েন্স কংগ্রেসে পঠিত হইয়াছে।

প্রবাসী-র পাতায় এ বাদানুবাদ আরও দু-সংখ্যাব্যাপী চলেছিল। আশ্বিন ১৩৩৫-এ (সেপ্টেম্বর-অক্টোবর ১৯২৮) গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের লেখার প্রতিবাদে লিখলেন অনিলচন্দ্র সরকার, আর অগ্রহায়ণে (নভেম্বর-ডিসেম্বর) অনিলচন্দ্রের বিরুদ্ধে গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের পক্ষে লিখলেন জনৈক যোগেন্দ্রনাথ ঘোষ। উভয় নিবন্ধেরই শিরোনাম পূর্ববৎ ‘রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও মনোবিশ্লেষণ’ হলেও, রবীন্দ্রনাথ নিজে এ বিতর্কে প্রত্যক্ষ যোগদান করেন না।

গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের মতে যা নাকি কাব্য বা আর্টের দিকে থেকে ভারতবর্ষে প্রথম ‘সাইকো-অ্যানালিটিক্যাল’ লেখা, তা তিনি নিজেরই উদ্যোগে ছাপাবার ব্যবস্থা করেছিলেন খোদ ফ্রয়েডের নির্দেশনায় প্রকাশিত *International Journal of Psycho-analysis*-এ। উক্ত পত্রিকার দ্বাদশ বর্ষে, ১৯৩১-এ, ‘The Working

of an Unconscious Wish in the Creation of Poetry and Drama’ শিরোনামে সে লেখা প্রকাশিত হয়। প্রবন্ধে গোড়াতেই জানিয়েছেন রজনী হালদার,

It is my humble attempt at studying the poetry and drama of Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest poet of India of the present century. (Halder, 1931, 188)

বারো পাতা ব্যাপী দীর্ঘ সে ‘সাইকো-অ্যানালিটিক্যাল’ প্রবন্ধে রজনী হালদারের আনত প্রচেষ্টার দু-একটি নজির পেশ করা যাক। *খেয়া* কাব্যগ্রন্থের ‘পথের শেষ’ কবিতাটির প্রথম দুটি ছত্র, “পথের নেশা তখন লেগেছিল / পথ আমারে দিয়েছিল ডাক” এবং “গ্রাম ছাড়া ঐ রাঙা মাটির পথ, / আমার মন ভুলায় রে”, এই বহুশ্রুত গানটির প্রথম দুটি লাইন স্বকৃত অনুবাদে পেশ করে ব্যাখ্যা করেছেন মনঃসমীক্ষক,

“I possessed by the intoxication of the path — the path had called me”

Then in another song

“The path of red gravel that leads out of the village, seduces me!”

Here “The path of red gravel” is to be marked with attention. In Rabindranath’s drama and poetry there is all along a search for this path. This path is nothing but the via genitalis.” (Halder, 1931, 195)

এখানেই শেষ নয়; *জীবনস্মৃতি*-তে ব্যবহৃত নানা উপমা ও রূপকের আড়ালে লুকিয়ে থাকা প্রকৃত latent content কে খুঁজে বের করে এক আশ্চর্য তালিকা প্রণয়ন করেন তিনি। আপনাদের মনোরঞ্জনার্থে সে তালিকা হুবহু এখানে পেশ করলাম,

1. Earth — Mother earth — symbolizing mother.
2. The bottom, the inmost storey — genitals.
3. The grey coloured envelope on the surface — clothes.
4. Bamboo — symbolizing the membrum virile universally used in this sense in Bengali proverbs and words of abuse.
5. The charm of digging — Oedipus complex.
6. The man swallowed up bodily in the pit — symbolizes Oedipus coitus. (Halder, 1931, 193)

এমনই সব দুর্দান্ত-পাণ্ডিত্যপূর্ণ-দুঃসাধ্য-সিদ্ধান্তের শেষে প্রাবন্ধিক ঘোষণা করেন,

We have critically examined some of the poems and dramas of Rabindranath and have seen that the Oedipus complex in his unconscious has provided materials for his artistic creations. Rabindranath's craving for the transcendental, the distant and the formless is but the transformed desire for union with the mother. (Halder, 1931, 205)

এ লেখা কী নজরে পড়েছিল রবীন্দ্রনাথের? আমার অনুমান পড়েছিল। গিরীন্দ্রশেখর ও তাঁর অনুগামীদের হাতে নাস্তানাবুদ সরসীলাল বারবার চাইছিলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ এ বিষয়ে কিছু বলুন। কিন্তু কবির থেকে কোন সাড়া না পেয়ে অবশেষে তিনি চিঠি লিখলেন কবির ব্যক্তিগত সচিব অমিয় চক্রবর্তীকে। সে চিঠির উত্তর দিলেন খোদ রবীন্দ্রনাথ। তবে শুধু উত্তর দিয়েই থেমে থাকলেন না, পৌষ ১৩৩৮ (জানুয়ারি ১৯৩২)-এর *বিচিত্রা*-য় ‘সাইকো-এনালিসিস’ শিরোনামে ছেপে দিলেন সে চিঠি। ১০ অক্টোবর ১৯৩১-এ লেখা সেই চিঠির একটি অংশই আমার এ অনুমানের কারণ। অংশটি উদ্ধৃত করছি,

অমিয়কে যে চিঠি লিখেচ দেখলুন। সাইকো-এনালিসিস ক্ষেত্রে অধিকার প্রবেশ করতে চাই নে। এই বিজ্ঞানের সূচনাটি এখনো অপরিণত আকারে আছে তাই আপন ইচ্ছামত যা তা বলবার মতো এমন উপলক্ষ্য আর নেই। বিশেষতঃ নিজের মনের গ্লানিকে বিজ্ঞানের ছাপ মেরে কুৎসা আকারে চালান করার এমন সুযোগ আর পাওয়া যাবে না। এই তথাকথিত বিজ্ঞানবিভাগে বৈজ্ঞানিকের তকমা যে কেউ ধারণ করতে পারে, অধিকারী নির্বাচনের কোনো কঠোর পরীক্ষার ভিতর দিকে যাবার দরকার হয় না। বাংলাদেশে ব্যক্তিগত অসম্মানের আর একটি দ্বার মুক্ত হল; এ রসের রসিক যাঁরা তাঁরা পুলকিত হবেন। (ঠাকুর, ১৯৩২, ৭১৭)

এই পত্র প্রকাশিত হওয়ার পর রবীন্দ্রনাথ বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষকের জগৎ থেকে নিজেকে সম্পূর্ণ গুটিয়ে নিলেন। তাঁর ভাবনার সাথে ফ্রয়েডের ভাবনার সাযুজ্য থাকলেও বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষকের ভাবনার সাথে কোনো সাযুজ্য তৈরি হল না তাঁর। কিন্তু মনঃসমীক্ষকের দুনিয়া থেকে সরে এলেও তাঁর নিজের বিচরণের ক্ষেত্র, বাঙালি সাহিত্যের জগতে তখন মনঃসমীক্ষণের ঝড় উঠেছে। সে ঝড় থেকে রবীন্দ্রনাথ কী ভাবে রক্ষা করবেন নিজেকে?

সাহিত্যধর্ম বিচার : ‘ফ্রয়েডের বুটজুতো’ পরা ‘অতি আধুনিক’ বনাম রবীন্দ্রনাথ

বিংশ শতাব্দীর তৃতীয় দশকেই বাংলা সাহিত্যে অল্লীলতা ও যৌন প্রসঙ্গের পুনরাবির্ভাব। যেন অল্লীলতা এতদিন তাহার ন্যায় অধিকার হইতে বেদখল হইয়াছিল, এখন আবার দখল পাইল।... এই নূতন অল্লীলতা ভোল বদলাইয়া আসিয়াছে; তাহাদের মাথায় সত্যনিষ্ঠার তাজ, পায়ে ফ্রয়েডের বুটজুতো। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ২০১২ [১৪১৯], ৩৫৮)

১৬ মার্চ, ১৯৫০; নিজের দিনলিপিতে এ কথাগুলো লিখেছিলেন সাহিত্যিক শরদিন্দু বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় (১৮৯৯-১৯৭০)। শরদিন্দু ও তাঁর মতো অনেকেই, বিশ শতকের তৃতীয় দশকে সাহিত্যে অল্লীলতার দায়ে যাঁদের অভিযুক্ত করেছিলেন, সেই অভিযুক্তদের মুখপত্র রূপে চিহ্নিত ছিল দিনেশরঞ্জন দাশ ও গোকুল নাগের সম্পাদনায় কলকাতা থেকে প্রকাশিত *কল্লোল* (১৯২৩) পত্রিকা এবং ঢাকা থেকে প্রকাশিত তার দোসর, বুদ্ধদেব বসু সম্পাদিত *প্রগতি* (১৯২৭)। প্রথম পত্রিকাটির আয়ুষ্কাল প্রায় সাত বছর, আর দ্বিতীয়টি দু-বছরের সামান্য বেশি। এই দুই পত্রিকার সাথেই জুড়ে ছিল একটি তৃতীয় নাম, *কল্লোল*-এর দুই প্রধান লেখক প্রেমেন্দ্র মিত্র ও শৈলজানন্দ মুখোপাধ্যায় সম্পাদিত *কালি-কলম* (১৯২৬) পত্রিকা। এ গোষ্ঠীর প্রতিনিধি-স্থানীয় লেখক রূপে সে অভিযোগের প্রধান লক্ষ্য বুদ্ধদেব বসু, প্রেমেন্দ্র মিত্র বা অচিন্ত্যকুমার সেনগুপ্তের মতো তরুণ লেখকদের প্রতি হলেও, তরুণদের সাথে সাথে সে অভিযোগের অভিমুখ ছিল নরেশচন্দ্র সেনগুপ্ত (১৮৮২-১৯৬৪) বা জগদীশ গুপ্তের (১৮৮৬-১৯৫৭)। মতো বর্ষীয়ান সাহিত্যিকদের প্রতিও।

এ হেন সাহিত্যিকমীদের হাত থেকে বাঙালি সাহিত্যের সুচিহ্নিত রক্ষার দায় যাঁরা কাঁধে তুলে নিয়েছিলেন তাঁদের সেনাপতি ছিলেন *শনিবারের চিঠি*-র সম্পাদক, সজনীকান্ত দাস (১৯০০-১৯৬২)। তাঁর *আত্মস্মৃতি*-তে সরাসরি অভিযোগ করেন সজনীকান্ত, “ক্রিমিনোলজি সাইকো এনালাইসিসের শুষ্কপাতায় যৌনসম্বন্ধীয় থিওরির গুরু শ্রীযুক্ত নরেশচন্দ্র সেনগুপ্ত মহাশয়... এবং কলিকাতার কল্লোল সম্প্রদায়...” (দাশ, ১৯৯৪, ৭৪)।

কিন্তু যাদের প্রতি এ অভিযোগ ঠিক কী বক্তব্য ছিল তাঁদের? তাঁর *পাপের ছাপ* (১৯২২) উপন্যাসের তারিখবিহীন দ্বিতীয় সংস্করণের ‘উপোদঘাত’-এ স্পষ্ট লিখেছিলেন নরেশচন্দ্র সেনগুপ্ত,

...আমি আদর্শ মানুষ গড়িতে চেষ্টা করি নাই। যারা আমার গ্রন্থের নায়ক-নায়িকা; তারা নিতান্তই মানুষ। তাই তাদের যেমন একদিকে আদর্শ আছে, অপরদিকে তাদের রক্ত-মাংসের শরীরটাও আছে। (সেনগুপ্ত, তারিখবিহীন, /০)

‘আদর্শ’-এ এর পাশাপাশি এই “রক্ত-মাংসের শরীর”-এর উপস্থাপন, তার ঔচিত্যানৌচিত্য; তার সামাজিক শুভাশুভ, মঙ্গলামঙ্গল; শালীনসীমা বজায় রেখে এ উপস্থাপনের সম্ভাবনা বা অসম্ভবতা—এসব ঘিরেই বাদ-বিবাদ। বাদীপক্ষের অভিযোগ বিবাদী *কল্লোল-কালিকলম-প্রগতি*র দল, কন্টিনেন্টাল রিয়ালিজম ও ফ্রয়েডের দোহাই পেড়ে বাংলাসাহিত্যের শুদ্ধসূচী অঙ্গন ক্লেদকলুষে বিষিয়ে তুলেছে।

ডিসেম্বর ১৯২৬ [পৌষ ১৩৩৩]-এ দিল্লীতে অনুষ্ঠিত হয় ‘পঞ্চম প্রবাসী বঙ্গ সাহিত্য সম্মেলন’। সে সম্মেলনে সভাপতিত্ব করেন বাংলা সাহিত্যে ‘আধুনিকতা’-র ধ্বজবাহীদের অন্যতম খোদ সবুজ-পত্র সম্পাদক প্রথম চৌধুরী। সম্মেলনে *ক্যালকাটা মিউনিসিপাল গেজেট*-এর তৎকালীন সম্পাদক অমল হোম পঠিত ‘অতি-আধুনিক বাংলা কথা-সাহিত্য’ প্রবন্ধটিতে সেই একই অভিযোগের সূর। সে কালের জাতীয়তাবাদী-আধুনিক বাঙালি মানসে সদ্য-বিগত উনিশ-শতকের ব্রাহ্ম-ভিক্টোরিয় প্রেতের উপস্থিতির স্পষ্ট সাক্ষ্য বহনকারী এ নিবন্ধ প্রকাশ পায় পরের মাসেই; জানুয়ারি ১৯২৭ (মাঘ ১৩৩৩)-এর *ভারতবর্ষ*-এ। পলিটিক্যাল কারেক্টনেসের তাড়নায় টলস্টয়, তুর্গেনিভ বা ভিক্টর হুগোর সাহিত্যিক ধ্বংসাত্মক মেনে নিলেও ঢাকা পড়ে না শঙ্কিত প্রাবন্ধিকের প্রকৃত উদবেগ,

পশ্চিম হইতে অনুকূল বাতাস আসিয়া যদি তাহার পালে হাওয়া লাগাইয়া দিকে দিকে তাহার যাত্রা সুরু করাইয়া দিত, তাহা হইলে বাংলার নব কথা-সাহিত্য হয় তো একদিন জগতের সাহিত্য-সঙ্গমতীর্থে আসিয়া তরী ভিড়াইতে পারিত। কিন্তু “continental” কথা-সাহিত্যের মোহে আবিষ্ট হইয়া সে পথ বুঝি বা অবরুদ্ধ হইয়া গেল; (হোম, ১৯২৭ [১৩৩৩], ২৯৫)

বাঙালিকে পূর্বের সূর্যের চেয়েও অনেক বেশি চোখ ধাঁধানো আলোর খোঁজ দেওয়ার দাবীদার, ইংলিশ চ্যানেলের উত্তরের একটি নির্দিষ্ট দ্বীপই যে আসলে এ ‘পশ্চিম’-এর দ্যোতক তা বোধ করি আর বলবার অপেক্ষা রাখে না।

বাদী পক্ষের অন্যতম সজ্ঞীকান্ত সোজা দরবার জানালেন রবি-সভায়। ৭ মার্চ, ১৯২৭ [২৩ ফাল্গুন, ১৩৩৩]-এ লিখিত এক পত্রে রবীন্দ্রসকাশে জানান সজ্ঞীকান্ত, ‘যৌনতত্ত্ব, সমাজতত্ত্ব বা এই ধরনের বিষয়কে উপজীব্য করে, ‘এতাবৎকাল’,

‘কবিতা ও গদ্যের যে প্রচলিত রীতি’ তাকে নস্যাৎ করে; ‘বাইরেরকার চেহারা’ বা আঙ্গিক ও ‘ভেতরের ভাব’ উভয়তই ‘উচ্ছৃঙ্খল’ কিছু রচনা *কল্লোল* ও *কালি-কলম*-এর মতো কাগজে প্রকাশিত হচ্ছে। ‘এই শ্রেণীর লেখকদের অগ্রণী’ নরেশচন্দ্র সেনগুপ্তের লেখনী সম্পর্কে রবীন্দ্রনাথের প্রশংসা ‘সত্যিকার প্রশংসা’ না ‘ব্যাজস্তুতি’ তা স্পষ্ট নয় সজ্ঞীকান্তের কাছে, তাই স্পষ্ট দাবী তাঁর,

...আপনার মতামতের জন্যে আমি আপনাকে এই চিঠি দিচ্ছি। বিরুদ্ধে বা পক্ষে যে দিকেই আপনি মত দেন, আপনার মত সাধারণের জন্যে প্রয়োজন।... ক্ষুদ্র লেখকের লেখনীতে সত্য প্রতিবাদও অনেক সময় ঈর্ষ্যা বলে হেলা পায়। আপনি কথা বললে আর যাই বলুক, ঈর্ষ্যার অপবাদ কেউ দেবে না। (ঠাকুর, ২০০৪, ৬৩-৬৬)

এ চিঠির উত্তর দিতে দেরি করেন না রবীন্দ্রনাথ। ৯ মার্চ ১৯২৭ (২৫ ফাল্গুন ১৩৩৩) সজ্ঞীকান্তকে জবাবী পত্রে সরাসরি মত প্রকাশ না করলেও তিনি জানান যে ‘আধুনিক সাহিত্য’ তাঁর বিশেষ চোখে না পড়লেও, হঠাৎ যা নজরে আসে তাতে যে ‘কলমের আঁক ঘুচে আছে’ তা তাঁর দৃষ্টি এড়ায় না। স্পষ্ট বক্তব্য কবির,

আমি সেটাকে সুশ্রী বলি এমন ভুল করো না। কেন করিনে তার সাহিত্যিক কারণ আছে, নৈতিক কারণ এ স্থলে গ্রাহ্য না হ’তেও পারে। আলোচনা করতে হ’লে সাহিত্য ও আর্টের মূলতত্ত্ব নিয়ে পড়তে হবে... (ঠাকুর, ২০০৪, ১-২)

রবীন্দ্রজীবনীকার প্রভাতকুমার মুখোপাধ্যায় জানান, “মালয়-যাত্রার পূর্বে অনুরোধেই হউক বা কর্তব্যবোধেই হউক কবি ‘সাহিত্যধর্ম’ নামে প্রবন্ধ লিখিলেন”। (মুখোপাধ্যায়, ১৯৬১, ৩০৭) সদ্য প্রকাশিত বিচিত্রা পত্রিকার দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যা জুলাই ১৯২৭ [শ্রাবণ ১৩৩৪]-এ প্রকাশিত হয় ‘সাহিত্যধর্ম’। এ রচনার গোড়াতেই লেখক বৈঠকী আমেজে তৈরি করেন এক নাটকীয় মুহূর্ত। জানান তিনি “কোটালপুত্র, সওদাগরপুত্র, আর রাজপুত্র এই তিন জনে বাহির হন রাজকন্যার সম্মানে।” এই সাধারণ বিবৃতিটি দেওয়ার সাথে সাথে তিনি পাঠককে স্মরণ করিয়ে দেন “বস্তুত রাজকন্যা বলে যে—একটি সত্য আছে তিন রকমের বুদ্ধি তাকে তিন পথে সম্মান করে।” “তিন রকমের বুদ্ধি” যেন তিন স্বতন্ত্র ধারা, আর সে ধারার ধারক যেন তিন প্রতিনিধিস্থানীয় নায়ক—

১। রাজার পুত্র। নিজের আপাতত না থাকলেও যাঁর বাবা রাজার কাছে রাজ্য, আর তার আছে সেই রাজ্যলাভের পূর্ণ সম্ভাবনা। একেবারেই লাগসই উচ্চবর্গীয় নায়ক সে।

২। কোটালের পুত্র। কোটার অধস্তন কর্মচারী তাঁর পিতা। বঙ্গীয় শব্দকোষ প্রণেতা আমাদের জানান, কোটার শব্দধ্বনি সংস্কৃত কোষ্ঠ শব্দের কাছে। সংস্কৃত কোষ্ঠ প্রাকৃত কোট্ট-এর পথে বাঙলায় কোটা রূপ ধারণ করেছে। সাধারণ অর্থ এ শব্দের ইষ্টক নির্মিত বাড়ি, আর সে বাড়ি রক্ষা বা তার ফরমান বয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়াই কোটালের কাজ। বলা বাহুল্য, শাসকের গৃহ, এই বিশেষ অর্থেই কোটা শব্দটি এখানে প্রযুক্ত। কোটাল ‘সে গৃহের’ অধস্তন—এই অলংকারের আড়াল ঢাকতে পারেনা যে সত্যকে তা হল সে শাসকের অধস্তন। ইতালীয় চিন্তাবিদ আস্তোনিও গ্রামশির পরিভাষা অনুসরণ করে তাকে আমরা বলতেই পারি আদর্শ সাবঅল্টার্ন বা উপবর্গীয় মানুষ। তাঁর পুত্র ব্যতীত কেই বা হতে পারে যথার্থ উপবর্গীয় নায়ক। আর আছে

৩। সওদাগরের পুত্র। বণিক নায়ক বা মার্চেন্ট হিরোর আদর্শ প্রতিক্রম সে।

রবীন্দ্রনাথের মতে এই তিন স্বতন্ত্র সামাজিক অবস্থানের তিন নায়ক আসলে ‘তিন রকমের বুদ্ধি’র প্রতিভূ। কী সেই তিন রকমের বুদ্ধির রূপ?

জানান রবীন্দ্রনাথ কোটালপুত্রের নাকি “ডিটেক্টিভ বুদ্ধি, সে কেবলই জেরা করে।” আর সে জেরায় নাকি রাজকন্যার “নাড়ীনক্ষত্র” কিছুই আর গোপন থাকে না। “...রূপের আড়াল থেকে বেরিয়ে আসে শরীরতত্ত্ব, গুণের আবরণ থেকে মনস্তত্ত্ব।” কিন্তু এ তত্ত্বের এলাকায় সে সব মেয়েই সমান, ঘুঁটেকুড়োনির সাথে রাজকন্যার কোনো তফাৎ থাকেনা, সে কথা, নাকি তার প্রশ্রয়িতা “বৈজ্ঞানিক” বা “দার্শনিক” মন সম্পূর্ণ বিস্মৃত হয়। “ভালবাসায় রাজকন্যার হৃদস্পন্দন কোন ছন্দের মাত্রায় চলে” তা মাপার জন্য টিনের চোঙ ব্যবহার করতে কোটালপুত্রের বৈজ্ঞানিক বুদ্ধি এক ফোঁটাও পীড়িত হয় না।

সওদাগরপুত্রের আছে মুনাফার হিসেব। তার অনুসন্ধানের বিষয় রাজকন্যে কতখানি কাজের মানুষ। জানতে চায় সে রাজকন্যে রান্না জানেন কিনা, সুতো কাটতে বা ফুলকাটা কাপড় বুনতে পারেন কিনা। রাজকন্যা নিজের হাতে দুধ থেকে যে ননী তোলেন তাকে টিনের কৌটোয় পুরে বড়বাজারে চালান করতে সওদাগরপুত্রের একটুও বাধে না।

আর রাজপুত্র? সে বৈজ্ঞানিক নয়, অর্থনীতির পরীক্ষা উত্তীর্ণ হয়নি; লেখকের ধারণা সে শুধু উত্তীর্ণ হয়েছে “চব্বিশ বছর বয়স এবং তেপান্তরের মাঠ”। সে

এই দুর্গম পথ পার হয়েছে “জ্ঞানের জন্য না, ধনের জন্য না, রাজকন্যারই জন্য”। সে কোটালপুত্রের মতো রাজকন্যার নাড়ীনক্ষত্র জানতে চায়না, সওদাগরপুত্রের মতো বুঝে নিতে চায়না রাজকন্যে কতখানি গৃহকর্মনিপুণা, সে শুধু রাজকন্যার কানে কানে বলে, “তুমি যে তুমিই, এই আমার যথেষ্ট।” টিনের চোঙ বা কৌটো দূরে থাক এমনকি স্বপ্নে রাজকন্যের জন্য টিনের বাজুবন্ধ গড়াচ্ছে দেখলেও রাজপুত্রের দম আটকে আসে। “ঘুম থেকে উঠেই সোনা যদি নাও জোটে অস্ত্র চাঁপাকুঁড়ির সম্মানে তাকে বেরোতেই হবে।” রবীন্দ্রনাথের মতে রাজপুত্র আবিষ্কৃত এই “রাজকন্যার স্থান ল্যাবরেটরিতে নয়, হাটবাজারে নয়, হৃদয়ের সেই নিত্য বসন্তলোকে যেখানে কাব্যের কল্পলতায় ফুল ধরে।”

রাজপুত্র না হলেও খেতাবি রাজপুত্রের পৌত্র রবীন্দ্রনাথের অবচেতনই কি উপবর্গীয় নায়ক কোটালপুত্রের উপর আরোপ করে ‘ফ্রয়েডের বুটজুতো’ পরা কল্লোল-প্রগতি-র বৈজ্ঞানিক কৌতূহল?

রবীন্দ্রনাথের মতে তরুণরা যে *real* বা বাস্তবের ধোঁয়া তুলেছেন সেই *real*-এর প্রকৃত অর্থ বাস্তব নয়, ‘যথার্থ’ বা ‘সার্থক’। তিনি স্মরণ করিয়ে দেন ‘সাধারণ সত্য’ আর ‘সার্থক সত্য’ ভিন্ন জিনিস। “সাধারণ সত্যে একেবারে বাহ্যবিচার নেই, সার্থক সত্য আমাদের বাছাই করা।” স্পষ্ট জানান রবীন্দ্রনাথ, “আমার মন যার মধ্যে অর্থ পায় না আমার পক্ষে তা অযথার্থ।” এই যথার্থকে গ্রহণ, বরণীয়কে বরণের ঝোঁক যে অনেক সময় ‘শুচিবায়ুর পরিচয়’ও বহন করে এমন উদাহরণও পেশ করেন তিনি, “সজনে ফুলে সৌন্দর্যের অভাব নেই। তবু ঋতুরাজের রাজ্যাভিষেকের মন্ত্রপাঠে কবিরাজ সজনেফুলের নাম করেন না।” খাদ্যতালিকার অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়েই না কি “সজনে আপন ফুলের যথার্থ্য” খুঁয়েছে। শুধু সজনে কেন, ঐ একই দোষে বকফুল, বেগুন ফুল বা কুমড়োফুল কাব্যের দরজার বাইরে নতমস্তকে দাঁড়িয়ে। অথচ ছিঁটে-মাত্রা গন্ধ না থাকলেও নেহাত খিদের আগুনের আঁচ লাগেনি বর্লোই, কুন্দ বা টগরের দিব্যি দরজার ভিতরে প্রবেশাধিকার মিলেছে। রবীন্দ্রনাথের দাবী, সে জিনিস “প্রয়োজনের... ছায়াতে রাহুগ্রস্ত” তার “যথার্থ” রূপ আমাদের চোখে ধরা পড়ে না। রান্নাঘর বা ভাঁড়ারঘর গৃহস্থের নিত্য প্রয়োজনে লাগে অথচ তাকে সে লোকচক্ষুর অন্তরালেই রাখতে পছন্দ করে; পক্ষান্তরে বৈঠকখানা নিত্য প্রয়োজনের নিরিখে অপরিহার্য নয়, “তবু সেই ঘরেই যত সাজসজ্জা, যত মালমশলা; গৃহকর্তা সেই ঘরেই ছবি টাঙিয়ে কাপেট পেতে তার উপরে নিজের সাধ্যমতো সর্বকালের ছাপ মেরে দিতে চায়।”

রবীন্দ্রনাথ মনে করেন ‘জীবধর্মে’ মানুষের সাথে পশুর কোনো তফাৎ নেই। আহার বা মৈথুন উভয়ই এই জীবধর্মের অন্তর্গত। কিন্তু “এই প্রবৃত্তিতে মনুষ্যত্বের সার্থকতা মানুষ উপলব্ধি করেনা।” “প্রজনার্থং” যৌন-মিলনে মানুষের সার্থকতা নেই, মনুষ্যত্বের সার্থকতা তাঁর মতে “প্রেমে”, যেখানে রয়েছে “মনের মিলনের নিবিড় যোগ।”

দাবী রবীন্দ্রনাথের, নারী-পুরুষের এই “প্রজনার্থং” জীবধর্মী যৌনমিলন একটি “সাধারণ সত্য”, ফলে তা বিজ্ঞানের এলাকাভুক্ত, কারণ “বিজ্ঞান পদার্থটা ব্যক্তিস্বভাববর্জিত; তার ধর্মই হচ্ছে সত্য সম্বন্ধে অপক্ষপাত কৌতূহল।” আর সাহিত্যের ধর্ম হচ্ছে “পক্ষপাতধর্ম”, সাহিত্য সার্থককে গ্রহণ, বরণীয়কে বরণ করতে চায়, বিশেষকে সবিশেষ করে তোলাই তার কাজ। রবীন্দ্রনাথের অভিযোগ বর্তমানে বিজ্ঞানের “নির্বীচার কৌতূহল সাহিত্যের সেই বরণ করে নেবার স্বভাবকে পরাস্ত করতে উদ্যত” হয়েছে।

এ রচনার উপসংহারে রবীন্দ্রনাথের প্রশ্ন যে সাম্প্রতিক কালে যেসব দেশে “বিজ্ঞানের অপ্রতিহত প্রভাবে অলঙ্ঘ্য কৌতূহলবৃত্তি দুঃশাসনমূর্তি ধরে সাহিত্যলক্ষ্মীর বস্ত্রহরণের অধিকার দাবী করছে” সে সব দেশের অন্তরে বাহিরে এত তীব্ররূপে বিজ্ঞান প্রবেশ করেছে যে তারা “বিজ্ঞানের দোহাই পেড়ে এই দৌরাণ্যের কৈফিয়ৎ দিতে পারে।” কিন্তু এদেশে “অন্তরে-বাহিরে বুদ্ধিতে ব্যবহারে” যেখানে কোথাও এখনও বিজ্ঞান প্রবেশ করতে পারেনি সেখানে এদেশের সাহিত্যিক এই “ধার-করা নকল নির্লজ্জতাকে” কী দিয়ে চাপা দেবেন?

রবীন্দ্রনাথের ‘সাহিত্যধর্ম’ প্রকাশ হয়েছিল জুলাই ১৯২৭ [শ্রাবণ ১৩৩৪]-এর *বিচিত্রা*-য়। এর ঠিক পরের সংখ্যায়, আগস্ট ১৯২৭ [ভাদ্র ১৩৩৪]-এর *বিচিত্রা*-য় মুদ্রিত হল এ লেখার সমালোচনা, শিরোনাম *সাহিত্যধর্মের সীমানা*। লেখক সেই নরেশচন্দ্র সেনগুপ্ত, সজনীকান্তের চোখে যিনি *কল্লোল-প্রগতি*-র “যৌন সম্বন্ধীয় থিয়োরির গুরু।”

গোড়াতেই নরেশচন্দ্র বিবৃতির ঢঙে জানিয়ে দেন, “কিছুকাল” হল বাংলা সাহিত্যে এক নতুন ধারা সকলেরই নজরে পড়েছে, যে ধারার পথিকরা রস উদ্‌বোধনের সাবেকি রাস্তা ছেড়ে “অমীমাংসিত” পথে রসের উৎস খুঁজে বেড়াচ্ছেন। “অনেকের মতে শ্রীরবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর মহাশয় এ ভাবগঙ্গার ভগীরথ।” কোনো “স্থিতিস্থাপক জনসমাজ” নতুনের সম্মুখীন হলে প্রতিরোধের “কোলাহল” তোলে, এক্ষেত্রেও তার ব্যতিক্রম হয়নি। “সাবেক সমাজ” এই নতুন সাহিত্যের প্রতি অনেক

“ইট পাটকেল যা খুশি” ছুঁড়েছে। নেহাতই আক্রমণের হিড়িকে সেসব “ক্ষাত্রধর্মী সাহিত্য সমালোচক”-এর দল এমনকি গুলিয়ে ফেলেছে শত্রু-মিত্র, নূতন-পুরাতন, বা লক্ষ্য-অলক্ষ্যের ভেদজ্ঞান। কিন্তু তাতে “নূতনধারার সাহিত্য বিচলিত হয় নাই।” কিন্তু আজ যখন স্বয়ং “রথীশ্রেষ্ঠ” রবীন্দ্রনাথ “আক্রমণকারীদের রথের উপর এসে” বসেছেন তা দেখে নবসাহিত্য “চমকিত”। কুরুক্ষেত্রে “দ্রোণাচার্যকে আপনার বিরুদ্ধে রথারূঢ়” দেখে যেমন গান্ধীবীর ক্রৌবের উদয় হয়েছিল, তেমনি এতদিন “নূতন রসের পূজারী”, “নূতন ধারার মন্ত্রগুরু” বলে যাঁর ভজনা করেছে তার থেকে আঘাত পেয়ে ‘নবসাহিত্য’ আজ “বিদ্রাস্ত ও বিচলিত”।

এতদিন ধরে এই নতুন সাহিত্য বিষয়ে প্রধান অভিযোগ ছিল তা “সমাজনীতি বিরুদ্ধ” এবং জাতে “বিলাতী”, রবীন্দ্রনাথের ‘সাহিত্যধর্ম’, প্রবন্ধের “তলায় তলায়” নাকি সে অভিযোগই ইঙ্গিতে করা হয়েছে। যদিও তিনি বলতে “বাধ্য” হয়েছেন, “সাহিত্যে যৌন সমস্যা নিয়ে তর্ক উঠেছে, সামাজিক হিতবুদ্ধির দিক দিয়ে তার সমাধান হবে না, তার সমাধান কলারসের দিক থেকে।”

চোস্ত নৈয়ায়িক ভঙ্গিতে নরেশচন্দ্রের অভিযোগ রবীন্দ্রনাথ গোড়াতেই বিচারহীনভাবে স্বীকার্য্য ধরে মত প্রকাশ করেছেন যে, “সম্প্রতি আমাদের সাহিত্যে বিদেশের আমদানী যে একটা বে-আব্রুতা এসেছে” তা কলারসের পরিপন্থী।

নরেশচন্দ্রের বক্তব্য প্রথমতঃ এই “সম্প্রতি” কথাটা কোনো বিশেষ সাহিত্যিকর্ম বা স্রষ্টাকে বোঝায় না, এবং “সম্প্রতি” শব্দে “অনুরূপা দেবীর মতন খজাহস্ত শুচিধর্ম সাহিত্যিকও” বোঝায়, কিন্তু রবীন্দ্রনাথের এই বক্তব্যের নিশ্চয়ই তিনি উদ্দেশ্য নন। সুতরাং রবীন্দ্রনাথের উচিত ছিল এ অভিযোগ কাদের প্রতি তা গোড়াতেই স্পষ্ট করে বলা।

দ্বিতীয়তঃ এই “বিদেশের আমদানী” ব্যাপারটা পরিচয় হিসেবে খুবই অস্পষ্ট কারণ “এক হিসাবে রাজা রামমোহনের পরবর্তী সমস্ত সাহিত্যই অল্পবিস্তর বিলাতের আমদানী।” এমনকি নরেশচন্দ্রের দাবী যে পাঠক বিদেশী কবিতার রসাস্বাদনে অপারগ রবীন্দ্রনাথের বহু কবিতার রসগ্রহণ তাদের পক্ষে অসম্ভব।

আর সর্বোপরি সাহিত্যে নরনারীর যৌনসম্বন্ধের উল্লেখ, বা “বে-আব্রুতা” বিষয়েও রবীন্দ্রনাথের মত “সুকর নয়” বলেই নরেশচন্দ্রের মনে হয় কারণ, “বে-আব্রুতা”র ধারণা দেশে-দেশে কালে কালে ভিন্ন, শুধু তাই নয়, এমনকি একই দেশ ও কালেও তার ভিন্নতা থাকতে পারে। উদাহরণ স্বরূপ বলেন নরেশচন্দ্র,

“মুসলমানের কাছে যে নারী একেবারে বে-আব্রু, বিলাতে সে অত্যধিক আবৃত বলিয়া পরিগণিত হইবে।” আর আমাদের দেশের যেসব পুরুষ “সেমিজ বিহীন সুক্ষ্ম-শাড়ী পরিহিতা” নারীর দিক চাইতে বিন্দুমাত্রও সঙ্কোচ বোধ করেন না তার চোখ আবার ইংরেজ মহিলার পোষাকে বে-আব্রুতার লক্ষণ খুঁজে পায়।

“বে-আব্রুতা” শব্দের আড়ালে রবীন্দ্রনাথের আসল আপত্তি যে যৌনসম্বন্ধের উপস্থাপন সে বিষয়ে নরেশচন্দ্র নিশ্চিত, এক্ষেত্রে তাঁর স্পষ্ট বক্তব্য, “শারীর ব্যাপার মাত্রই তো অপাংক্তেয় নয়।” তার কারণ প্রথমতঃ, “প্রয়োজন অপপ্রয়োজন” দিয়ে কাব্যের সার্থকতা নির্ণয় হয় না; আর দ্বিতীয়তঃ “যৌন সম্বন্ধের যে দিকটা পশুধর্ম” বলে রবীন্দ্রনাথ নির্দেশ করেছেন রসের বিচারে তা “চিরকাল অসার্থক” একথাও ঠিক নয়। কাব্য চিরকাল শুধু মানসিক প্রেম নিয়ে সীমাবদ্ধ না থেকে দৈহিক ব্যাপারেও আপন সার্থকতা অনুসন্ধান করেছে এবং “চুম্বন আলিঙ্গন ছাড়িয়া খুব কম কাব্যই প্রেমের চিত্ররচনায় সার্থকতা লাভ করিয়াছে।” উদাহরণ স্বরূপ তিনি বিদেশী কোনো কবি নয়, বরং কালিদাসের মেঘদূত, ঋতুসংহার বা বিদ্যাপতি ও চণ্ডীদাসের পদাবলীতে অঙ্কিত সন্তোগচিত্রের উল্লেখ করেন। পাশাপাশি একথাও উল্লেখ করতে নরেশচন্দ্র পিছুপা হন না যে, রবীন্দ্রনাথ যৌনমিলনের যে ভাগটাকে রস হিসেবে “অসার্থক” বলে নামঞ্জুর করেছেন, “Theophile Gautier ও Maxim Gorky সেই ব্যাপার লইয়া যাহা লিখিয়াছেন তাহাকে সামাজিক শীলতার দিক হইতে যাহাই বলিবার থাকুক, রস হিসাবে তাহার ঐশ্বর্য্য কেহ অস্বীকার করিবেন না।”

নিজের যুক্তির স্বপক্ষে প্রমাণ স্বরূপ রবীন্দ্রনাথের বিরুদ্ধে রবীন্দ্রনাথকেই খাড়া করেন নরেশচন্দ্র। দাবি তাঁর বাংলা সাহিত্যে চুম্বনের মতো শারীর বিষয়ের স্থান “বন্ধিম থেকে রবীন্দ্রনাথ পর্যন্ত সকল সকল সাহিত্য সম্রাট”-ই “পাশ করিয়ে দিয়েছেন”, “আলিঙ্গনও” অপাংক্তেয় থাকেনি। “দৈহিক ব্যাপার লইয়া অপূর্ব রস উদবোধন” যে সম্ভব তার নজির হিসাবে নরেশচন্দ্র পেশ করেন ‘চোখের বালি’ ও ‘ঘরে-বাইরে’র মতো রবীন্দ্র-উপন্যাস বা ‘হৃদয়-যমুনা’, ‘স্তন’, ‘বিজয়িনী’ ও ‘চিত্রাঙ্গদা’র মতো রবীন্দ্র-কাব্য।

নরেশচন্দ্রের ‘সাহিত্যধর্মের সীমানা’-র প্রত্যুত্তরে আশ্বিনের *বিচিত্রা*-য় প্রকাশিত হয় দ্বিজেন্দ্রনাথ বাগচীর ‘সাহিত্যধর্মের সীমানা-বিচার’। অগ্রহায়ণের *বিচিত্রা*-য় তার ‘কৈফিয়ৎ’ও দেন নরেশচন্দ্র। এ বাদ-বিবাদের সমান্তরালে *শনিবারের চিঠি*-র পাতায় আধুনিকদের প্রতি তাঁর বিদ্রোহের তীব্র নিক্ষেপ করে চলেছিলেন সজনীকান্ত। সে আক্রমণ থেকে রেহাই পেলেন না এমনকী ‘দরদী’ শরৎ চ্যাটার্জিও। বাধ্যত ময়দানে

অবতীর্ণ হলেন শরৎচন্দ্র চট্টোপাধ্যায়। সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯২৭ [আশ্বিন ১৩৩৪]-এর *বঙ্গবাণী*-তে প্রকাশিত হল তাঁর *সাহিত্যের রীতি ও নীতি*।

স্পষ্ট অভিযোগ শরৎচন্দ্রের, রবীন্দ্রনাথ “বারো মাসের মধ্যে তেরো মাস বিলাতে” থেকে “দৈবাৎ এক-আধটা টুকরো-টাকরা লেখা” যা নজরে পড়েছে তার উপর ভিত্তি করে, বাংলা সাহিত্য আব্রুতা ও আভিজাত্য সব খুঁিয়ে বসেছে এমন সিদ্ধান্ত করে “আধুনিক সাহিত্যিকদের প্রতি” মোটেই সুবিচার করেন নি। এতে শুধু নরেশচন্দ্র নন, তিনিও যার-পর-নয় বিস্মিত ও ব্যথিত।

বিজ্ঞানের ‘অপক্ষপাতী কৌতূহল’-এর বেড়া জাল সাহিত্যকে ঘিরে ধরেছে বলে রবীন্দ্রনাথের যে অভিযোগ তার উত্তরে গোড়াতেই শরৎচন্দ্র স্পষ্ট করে দেন যে “গল্পের ছলে ধাত্রীবিদ্যা” বা “উপন্যাসের আকারে কামশাস্ত্র”-এর প্রচারকে তিনি সাহিত্য বলে মনে করেন না; তবে পাশাপাশি তিনি এও জানান যে বিজ্ঞান বলতে তিনি, সাহিত্যধর্ম-প্রণেতা রবীন্দ্রনাথের মতো, কেবল “Sex-psychology, Anatomy বা Gynecology” বোঝেন না। তাঁর মতে “বিজ্ঞান কেবল অপক্ষপাত কৌতূহল নয়, কার্য-কারণের সম্বন্ধ বিচার”-ও বটে। শরৎচন্দ্রের দাবী; এই “কার্য-কারণের সম্বন্ধ বিচার”-এ জানা সত্য, যেমন দুই-এর সাথে দুই যোগ করলে তিন কিংবা পাঁচ নয় সর্বদা চার-ই হবে, বা সূর্য পৃথিবীর চার দিকে নয় পৃথিবী সূর্যের চারদিকে ঘোরে (এ সর্বই শরৎ প্রদত্ত উদাহরণ!), এক সুবিন্যস্ত চিন্তাধারার ফল। সে চিন্তাধারা কাব্যের জন্যে নিষ্প্রয়োজন হলেও উপন্যাস রচনার ক্ষেত্রে অপরিহার্য।

সাহিত্যে নর-নারীর যৌন-মিলনের উপস্থাপন সম্বন্ধে বলতে গিয়ে রবীন্দ্রনাথ যে শারীরিক ও মানসিক এই দুই ভাগ-এর উল্লেখ করেছেন তাকে অবশ্য সত্য বলে মেনে নেন শরৎচন্দ্র। নরেশচন্দ্রের মন-শরীর দ্বন্দ্বের সুস্পষ্ট সীমা-নির্দেশের দাবীর প্রতি শরৎচন্দ্রের জিজ্ঞাসা, “...সুস্পষ্ট সীমারেখা কী ইহার আছে না কি যে ইচ্ছা করিলেই কেহ আঙুল দিয়া দেখাইয়া দিবে?” (চট্টোপাধ্যায়, সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯২৭, ২৪৩)

এ সব বাদানুবাদ নজর এড়ায় নি রবীন্দ্রনাথের। *সাহিত্যধর্ম*-এ বিবৃত তাঁর মতকে আরও সুস্পষ্ট করতে তাই মালয়-যাত্রার পথে জাহাজে বসেই তিনি লিখলেন *সাহিত্যধর্ম*-এর পরিপূরক নিবন্ধ *সাহিত্যে নবত্ব*। নভেম্বর ১৯২৭ [অগ্রহায়ণ ১৩৩৪]-এর *প্রবাসী*-তে প্রকাশিত হল সে লেখা।

এ রচনার গোড়াতেই স্মরণ করিয়ে দেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ, সব দেশের সাহিত্যের “প্রধান কাজ... শোনবার লোকের আসনটিকে বড় করে তোলা, যখন থেকে দাবী

আসে।... বনেদী সাহিত্য এই শোনবার কান তৈরি করে তোলে।” যে সমাজে এই “শোনবার কান তৈরি হয়েছে” এমন পাঠকের সংখ্যা যথেষ্ট সে দেশে বড় করে লেখবার শক্তি বহু লেখকের মধ্যে আপনা হতেই দেখা যায়। রবীন্দ্রনাথের মতে “বাংলাদেশে প্রথম ইংরেজি শিক্ষার যোগে এমন সাহিত্যের সাথে আমাদের চেনাশোনা হল” ফলতঃ এ দেশের স্রোতার “শোনবার কান” এখনও যথেষ্ট কাঁচা। তাই বাঙালি সাহিত্যিকের প্রতি রবীন্দ্রনাথের সাবধানবাণী, এদেশে সাহিত্যিকের কানের কাছে “সর্বদাই যারা ভিড় করে থাকে” তাদের এড়িয়ে যাওয়ার মতো মনের জোর বাঙালি সাহিত্যিকের থাকা জরুরি। “ইংরেজি শিক্ষার গোড়াতেই” বাঙালি যে সাহিত্যের পরিচয় পেয়েছিল তাতে “বিশ্বসাহিত্যের আদর্শ” থাকলেও সে “আদর্শ” যে ইউরোপে সকল সময় সমান উজ্জ্বল থাকে নি সে কথা রবীন্দ্রনাথ স্মরণ করিয়ে দেন।

সার্বজনীন সাহিত্যের আদর্শ স্মরণ করাতে গিয়ে তিনি টেনে আনেন আদি-কবির ইউরোপীয় প্রত্নপ্রতিমা হোমার-কে। মত তার, হোমারে কাহিনীটি গ্রীক হলেও তার ‘আদর্শ সার্বভৌমিক’। আদর্শের উদাহরণে ঢুকে পড়ে শরৎচন্দ্রের নামও, “শরৎ চট্টোপাধ্যায়ের গল্পটা বাঙালির কিন্তু গল্প বলাটা একান্ত বাঙালির নয়।” (ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯ [১৩৬৫], ৮৫) মালয়যাত্রার পূর্বে আশ্বিনের বঙ্গবাণী হাতে পেয়েছিলেন তাহলে রবীন্দ্রনাথ! স্মরণ করান কবি, “সাহিত্যের একটা বড় গুণ অ-পূর্বতা, ওরিজিন্যালিটি”। “বাঁধা বুলি” আওড়ে প্রাপনীয় নয় সে ‘ওরিজিন্যালিটি’। সাবধান করেন কবি, বাংলা “আধুনিক সাহিত্যে... অপটু লেখকের পাকশালায়” চট্-জলদি রান্নার জন্য ‘দারিদ্র্যের আত্মফালন’ ও ‘লালসার আসংযম’-এ প্রস্তুত সুলভ ‘রিয়ালিটির কারি-পাউডার’ তো আছেই, কিন্তু বারংবার এক মশলায় কাজ সারতে চাইলেই ঘনাবে বিপদ। এই বলে শেষ হয় সে রচনা,

দৈহিক সহজ উত্তেজনাকে কাব্যের বিষয় করতে যদি না বাঁধে তা হলে সামান্য খরচাতেই উপস্থিত মতো কাজ চালানো যায়—কিন্তু এইটাই সাহিত্যিক কাপুরুষতা।
(ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯ [১৩৬৫], ৯৩)

মালয়যাত্রা সেরে কবি কলকাতায় ফিরতেই সজনীকান্ত প্রস্তাব করলেন একটি সর্ব-দলীয় সভা ডাকার। ১৭ মার্চ, ১৯২৮ [৪ চৈত্র, ১৩৩৪] সে সভা বসলো জোড়াসাঁকোর বিচিত্রা-গৃহে। ১৯ মার্চ, ১৯২৮ [৬ চৈত্র, ১৩৩৪] বাঙলার কথা পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত হল সে সভার বিবরণ। সে বিবরণ মোটেই পছন্দ হল না

রবীন্দ্রনাথের। ক্ষুব্ধ কবি পুনরায় সভা আহ্বান করলেন ২০ মার্চ, ১৯২৮ [৭ চৈত্র, ১৩৩৪]। এবারে সভা বিবরণ লেখার দায়িত্ব নিলেন তিনি স্বয়ং। সে বিবরণ যথাক্রমে সাহিত্য রূপ ও সাহিত্য সমালোচনা শিরোনামে প্রকাশিত হল ১৯২৮ [১৩৩৫]-এর এপ্রিল [বৈশাখ] ও মে [জ্যৈষ্ঠ]-র প্রবাসী-তে।

মে [জ্যৈষ্ঠ]-র বিবরণীতে ‘আধুনিক সাহিত্য’ প্রসঙ্গে তিনি লিখলেন, আধুনিক সাহিত্যে, ‘কলুষ’-রূপে যা চিরকাল বর্জিত হয়ে এসেছে, “তাকেই চরম বর্ণনীয় বিষয় করে দেখানো এক শ্রেণীর সাহিত্যিকদের... বিশেষ লক্ষ্য।” (ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯, [১৩৬৫], ২২৭) কেউ কেউ নাকি তার কারণ দর্শাতে বলেন, “এ সব প্রতিক্রিয়ার ফল”। এই প্রতিক্রিয়াবাদীদের প্রতি রবীন্দ্রনাথের স্পষ্ট সাবধানবাণী, “প্রতিক্রিয়া কখনোই প্রকৃতিস্থতা নয়। তা ক্ষণস্থায়ী অবস্থা মাত্রা প্রকাশ করে, তা চিরন্তন হতে পারে না।” (ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯ [১৩৬৫], ২২৭) আর শনিবারের চিঠি-র প্রতি তাঁর বক্তব্য যে তাঁরা যদি “সাহিত্যের সীমার মধ্যে থেকে... সমালোচনার পথে অগ্রসর হন, তা হলে বেশি ফল লাভ করবেন”। (ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯ [১৩৬৫], ২২৭) শনিবারের চিঠি-র লেখককুলের লেখনীর তীক্ষ্ণতার প্রশংসা করে তাঁদের ‘অनावশ্যক হিংস্রতা’ থেকে বিরত থাকার পরামর্শ দেন কবি। স্মরণ করিয়ে দেন তাঁদের, “অস্ত্র-চিকিৎসায় অস্ত্র চালানোর সতর্কতা অত্যন্ত বেশি দরকার, কেননা আরোগ্যবিধানই এর লক্ষ্য, মারা এর লক্ষ্য নয়।” (ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯ [১৩৬৫], ২২৮)

সব শেষে আধুনিকদের সাবধান করে বলেন, অভিজ্ঞতাকে অতিক্রম করে লেখা অসম্ভব, এবং দল বেঁধে আর যাই হোক সাহিত্য হয় না। স্পষ্ট বক্তব্য তাঁর,

সাহিত্য হচ্ছে একমাত্র সৃষ্টি যা মানুষ একলাই করেছে। যখন সেটা দল বাঁধার কোঁটায় গিয়ে পড়ে তখন সেটা আর সাহিত্য থাকে না। প্রত্যেকের নিজের ভিতর অভিমান থাকা উচিত যে ...একমাত্র আমি যেটা বলতে পারি সেটাই আমি লিখছি।
(ঠাকুর, ১৯৫৯ [১৩৬৫], ২৩০)

অবচেতনার অবদান

হাত-পা-চোখ-কানওয়ালা নেহাৎই জুবুথুবু এক জীব; অদূর বা সুদূর কোনো ভবিষ্যতেই যাকে উড়ান-সক্ষম কল্পনা করা নেহাৎ আহাম্মকের পক্ষেও অসম্ভব, উঠে দাঁড়িয়েছে কোনো আকাশ-বিহারক্ষম দীর্ঘচঞ্চুর মাথায়। নিজে হাতে আঁকা এই

কার্ডখানি শনিবারের চিঠির সম্পাদক সজনীকান্ত দাসকে উপহার দিয়েছিলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। কার্ডের নীচে ডানদিকের কোণায় চার-শব্দে ছবির নামকরণ “সাহিত্যে অবচেতন চিন্তের সৃষ্টি”, আর উপরে বামদিকে দস্তখত ও তারিখ ২১ নভেম্বর, ১৯৩৯। নেহাতই তথ্য যদিও, তবু চমকপ্রদ বলে উল্লেখ না করে পারছি না, মাত্র সাতাল্ল দিন আগে, ২৩শে সেপ্টেম্বর, লন্ডন শহরে শেষ নিঃশ্বাস ত্যাগ করেছেন তিরিশি বছর বয়সী সিগমুন্ড ফ্রয়েড।

এই কার্ডটির সাথে দুদিন আগে ১৯শে নভেম্বর ১৯৩৯-এ লিখিত একটি ছড়া। পরবর্তীতে ছড়া কাব্যগ্রন্থের সপ্তম কবিতা রূপে সংকলিত হয়েছিল এটি। প্রথম কটি ছত্র উদ্ধৃত করছি,

গলদা চিংড়ি তিংড়ি মিংড়ি
লম্বা দাঁড়ার করতাল,
পাকড়াশিদের কাঁকড়া ডোবায়
মাকড়শাদের হরতাল
পয়লা ভাদর, পাগলা বাঁদর
লেজ খানা যায় ছিঁড়ে,
পালতে মাদার, সেরেস্তাদার
কুটছে নতুন চিড়ে

নেহাতই চারমাত্রার ছন্দে সাজানো কতগুলো এলোমেলো, অসংলগ্ন ছবি free association method-এর কথা মনে করিয়ে দেয়। ছড়াটির একটি ছোটো মুখবন্ধ লিখে দিয়েছিলেন কবি,

অবচেতন মনের কাব্য রচনা অভ্যেস করছি। সচেতন বুদ্ধির পক্ষে বচনের অসংলগ্নতা দুঃসাধ্য। ভাবীযুগের সাহিত্যের প্রতি লক্ষ্য করে হাত পাকাতে প্রবৃত্ত হলেম। তারই এই নমুনা। কেউ কিছু বুঝতে যদি না পারেন তাহলেই আশাজনক হবে। (ঠাকুর, ২০০৪, ৩১)

‘কৌতুক চিত্র’ শিরোনামে ছবি ও মুখবন্ধসহ ছড়াটি নভেম্বর ১৯৩৯ (অগ্রহায়ণ ১৩৪৬)-এর *শনিবারের চিঠি*-তে প্রকাশ করেন সজনীকান্ত। ‘অবচেতনার অবদান’ ছবিটির উপর আরও একটি ‘অবচেতনার কাব্য’ সজনীকান্তকে দেওয়ার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছিলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। ১৮ জানুয়ারি ১৯৪০-এ রবীন্দ্রনাথকে এক পত্রে সে কথা স্মরণ করিয়ে দেন সজনীকান্ত। রবীন্দ্রনাথ তাঁর উত্তরে জানান বিশ্বভারতীর তহবিলের

জন্য ঝাড়গ্রামের রাজার কাছ থেকে যদি কিছু আর্থিক অনুদানের ব্যবস্থা করতে পারেন সজনীকান্ত তবেই তিনি দেবেন সে লেখা। ৮ মার্চ ১৯৪০-এ সজনীকান্তকে লিখিত পত্রে জানান কৌতুকদীপ্ত রবীন্দ্রনাথ,

তোমার প্রাপ্য সম্বন্ধে বঞ্চিত করব না আমার প্রাপ্ত যদি সুনিশ্চিত থাকে।
অবচেতন চিত্ত শব্দার্থ সম্বন্ধে হতবুদ্ধি থাকতে পারে কিন্তু পণ্য অর্থ সম্বন্ধে সজাগ।
(ঠাকুর, ২০০৪, ৪৪)

সজনীকান্ত শেষ অবধি বিশ্বভারতীর তহবিলের জন্য টাকা জোগাড় করতে সমর্থ না হলেও ১৮ মে তাঁর পূর্ব প্রতিশ্রুতি মতো সজনীকান্তকে আরও একটি ছড়া দেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। পরবর্তীতে এ রচনাটিও ছড়া কাব্যগ্রন্থের অন্তর্ভুক্ত হবে। রবীন্দ্র ঘনিষ্ঠ নন্দগোপাল সেনগুপ্ত আমাদের জানান মনঃসমীক্ষণ বিষয়ে শেষ জীবনে রবীন্দ্রনাথের আগ্রহের সংবাদ,

পরীক্ষামূলক মনোবিজ্ঞান সম্বন্ধেও পড়াশুনা তিনি অনেক করেছিলেন—ফ্রয়েড, এডলার, যুং-এর লেখা দাগ দিয়ে দিয়ে পড়েছেন দেখেছি। মনোবিকলন তত্ত্ব নিয়ে কিছু লিখতেও উৎসুক হয়েছিলেন—শেষ পর্যন্ত আর হয়ে ওঠেনি। ওখানকার অধ্যাপক বিনয়গোপাল রায়কে ভার দিয়েছিলেন বিষয়টি হালকা করে লিখতে... (সেনগুপ্ত, ১৯৪৪, ৬১)

জীবনের শেষ প্রান্তে পৌঁছে, ১৯৩৯-৪০-এর মধ্যে তিনটি গল্প লেখেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ—‘রবিবার’, ‘ছোটগল্প’ এবং ‘ল্যাবরেটরি’। তিনটি গল্পই প্রকাশিত হয় রবীন্দ্ররচনার প্রথম সাইকো-অ্যানালিটিকাল সমালোচনার প্রয়াস করেছিলেন যিনি, সেই সরসীলাল সরকারের ভগ্নিপতি, নির্বাহিণী সরকারের স্বামী প্রফুল্লচন্দ্র সরকারের সম্ভ্রাধীন দেশ ও আনন্দবাজার পত্রিকায়। ‘রবিবার’ প্রকাশিত হয় ১০ অক্টোবর ১৯৩৯ [২৫ আশ্বিন ১৩৪৬] *আনন্দবাজার পত্রিকা*-র *শারদীয়া* সংখ্যায়; ১৪ ডিসেম্বর ১৯৩৯ ৩০ [অগ্রহায়ণ ১৩৪৬] সাপ্তাহিক দেশ পত্রিকায় প্রকাশ পায় ‘ছোটগল্প’, আর ‘ল্যাবরেটরি’ মুদ্রিত হয় ৩০ সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯৪০ [১৫ আশ্বিন ১৩৪৭]-এর *শারদীয়া আনন্দবাজার পত্রিকা*-য়। ‘ছোটগল্প’-এর একটি পরিমার্জিত পাঠ ‘শেষকথা’ শিরোনামে প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল ফেব্রুয়ারি ১৯৪০ [ফাল্গুন ১৩৪৬]-এর *শনিবারের চিঠি*-তে। এই তিনটি গল্প নিয়েই রবীন্দ্রনাথের শেষ গল্পগ্রন্থ *তিন সঙ্গী*।

তিন সঙ্গী-তে ব্যবহৃত অধিকাংশ উপমা-রূপকই “বিজ্ঞানের জগৎ থেকে সংগৃহীত।” নজির, “ছুটির মাইক্রোব”, “নারীপ্রভাবের ম্যাগনেটিজমে জীবনের

মেরুপ্রদেশের আকাশে... অরোরার রঙিন ছটার আন্দোলন”, “পৌরুষের ম্যাগনেটিজম... স্নায়ুর পেশীর ভিতরকার বেতার বার্তার মতো।” (ঘোষ, ২০০১, ৩৬৮) কিন্তু শেষ পর্যন্ত প্রতিটি গল্পেই নারী-পুরুষের সম্পর্কের যে আদর্শে আস্থা তাঁর, তাকে প্রতিষ্ঠা করাই যেন রবীন্দ্রনাথের উদ্দেশ্য।

“রবিবার” গল্পের প্রধান পুরুষ অভীক। “কলকারখানা জোড়াভাড়া দেওয়া” আর “ছবি আঁকা” এই দুই “উলটো জাতের” শখওয়ালা অভীকের উপাসিকা সম্প্রদায়ের অভাব নেই। “মেয়েদের ভালবাসার যে মদটুকু আছে” তাতেই অভীকের “ইন্সপিরেশন”।

বিভার চোখে অভীকের উপাসিকাবৃন্দের এই মাতামাতি “অশিক্ষিতের ন্যাকামি” ছাড়া কিছু নয়। এতো কিছু পেয়েও কেবল বিভার সাড়া না পাওয়ার যন্ত্রণা অভীককে কাঁটার মতো বেঁধে। মনে হয় তাঁর, বিলেত গিয়ে সে যখন একদিন তাঁর ছবির জন্য প্রবল প্রশংসা লাভ করবে, সেদিন বিভাও তাঁর জন্যে বরমাল্য নিয়ে হাজির হবে। তার চোখে বিভার সৌন্দর্য “ইনস্কুটেবেল”।

বিভার কাছে নিজের প্রেমের স্বীকৃতি না পেয়ে উন্মাদপ্রায় অভীক বিভার মনের দীর্ঘ জাগাতে সচেষ্ট হয়। কিন্তু তাতেও যখন ব্যর্থ হয় সে তখন তাঁর প্রকৃত স্বপ্ন সফল করতে “জাহাজের স্টোকার হয়ে” রওনা দেয় সে বিলেত। আর জাহাজ থেকে বিভাকে চিঠিতে জানাল সে তাঁর বিপুল উপাসিকাকুল নাকি “নীহারিকামণ্ডলী” আর বিভা “তার মাঝখানে... একটিমাত্র ধ্রুবনক্ষত্র”।

‘শেষ কথা’ গল্পের নবীনমাধব “ন্যাশানাল দুর্গের গোড়া পাকা” করার ব্রত নিয়ে বিলেতে গিয়ে যন্ত্রবিদ্যা ও খনিজবিদ্যার পাঠ সেখানে দেশে ফিরে, মায়ের বিয়ের অনুরোধ উপেক্ষা করে, ছোটনাগপুরে জিওলজিকাল সার্ভের কাজে আত্মনিয়োগ করে।

রবীন্দ্র-ছোটগল্পের শিল্পরূপ প্রণেতা তপোব্রত ঘোষ জিওলজিকাল সার্ভের গুণার্থ বিষয়ে সজাগ করে দিয়েছেন পাঠককে। স্মরণ করিয়ে দিয়েছেন তিনি, পঞ্চভূত-এর বস্তুবাদী ক্ষিতির উক্তি, “দেবতা হইতে কীট পর্যন্ত সকলই মাটি হইতে উৎপন্ন”। (ঘোষ, ২০০১, ৩৭২) আর সেই মাটির গর্ভে কী লুকিয়ে আছে তাঁর সন্ধানে ছোটনাগপুরের অরণ্যভূমিতে হাজির হলো নবীনমাধব। এই বনভূমির বর্ণনা দিতে গিয়ে জানায় নবীনমাধব, “এটা কারখানাঘর নয়, কলেজ ক্লাস নয়, এ সেই সুখতন্দ্রার আবিল প্রদোষের রাজ্য যেখানে একলা মন পেলে প্রকৃতিমায়াবিনী... রঙেরেজিনীর কাজ করে।” (ঠাকুর, ১৯৬৪, ৩১) পূর্বপার্শ্বে এই অরণ্যকে বলা হয়েছিল “ঝিমিয়ে-পড়া ঝাপসা চেতনার দেশ”। (ঘোষ, ২০০১, ৩৭২) এই দেশেই অচিরার

সাথে নবীনমাধবের সাক্ষাৎ। বিজ্ঞান-ব্রতে ব্রতী নবীনমাধব ও প্রেমের ব্রতধারী অচিরা প্রবেশ করে এই বনে। ‘প্রকৃতিমায়াবিনী’র সাথে অচিরার ঘোরও ক্রমে ‘আবিল’ করে নবীনমাধবকে। সে “আবেশের ঘোর”-এর তীব্রতায় “মস্তুর হয়ে এসেছিল কাজের চাল”। ফলতঃ নবীনমাধবকে তাঁর ব্রতে স্থির রাখতে অচিরা শেষ অবধি প্রত্যাখ্যান করে তাকে, আর নিজের প্রেমের আদর্শ বজায় রাখতে ফিরে যায় তার পূর্বপ্রেমের কাছে।

‘ল্যাবরেটরি’ গল্পের সোহিনী বিজ্ঞানসাধক নন্দকিশোরের অনুরতা। যে অবস্থা থেকে তাকে নিয়ে এসেছিল নন্দকিশোর “সেটা খুব নির্মল নয়, এবং নিভৃত নয়”। নন্দকিশোরের বিজ্ঞান সাধনার প্রতীক তার ল্যাবরেটরি। সেই ল্যাবরেটরিতেই “দুঃসাহসিক বৈজ্ঞানিক পরীক্ষার অপঘাতে” যখন মৃত্যু হল নন্দকিশোরের, ল্যাবরেটরি রক্ষার ভার নিল সোহিনী। এ ল্যাবরেটরি তার “পূজোর দেবতা”, আর ল্যাবরেটরির টাকা ‘দেবতা’র ভাণ্ডার। “পূজোর দেবতা”কে রক্ষা করতে কোনো কাজেই পিছপা নয় সোহিনী। তাঁর স্পষ্ট কথা, “আজন্ম তপস্বিনী নই আমরা!... দ্রোপদীকুন্তীদের সেজে বসতে হয় সীতা-সাবিত্রী”। (ঠাকুর, ১৯৬৪, ১০১)

এই ল্যাবরেটরির দায়িত্ব সোহিনী ন্যস্ত করে বিজ্ঞানের উজ্জ্বল ছাত্র রেবতীর উপর। কিন্তু সোহিনীর নন্দকিশোরের সাথে আলাপপূর্ব জীবনের সম্মান নীলা রেবতীকে ল্যাবরেটরির ভিতর “ম্যাগনেটিজম নিয়ে কাজ”-এ উদ্বুদ্ধ করে তোলে। আশা করি বলার অপেক্ষা রাখে না যে ম্যাগনেটিজম বা চৌম্বকবিদ্যা এখানে নর-নারীর যৌন সম্পর্কের প্রতীক। ম্যাগনেটিজম-এর চর্চায় মেতে থাকা রেবতীর কৃপায় ল্যাবরেটরি যখন প্রায় ডুবতে বসেছে সেই চরম মুহূর্তে নিজ আত্মজার সুখের বিনিময়ে নিজের “পূজোর দেবতা”কে বাঁচায় সোহিনী। এ গল্পগুলির আলোচনা প্রসঙ্গে যথার্থই বলেছিলেন তপোব্রত,

সবুজ-পত্র পর্ব থেকেই গল্পগুচ্ছ-র গল্পে জীবনের বস্তুসত্যর চেয়ে ভাবসত্য প্রায় সর্বত্র বেশি গুরুত্ব পেয়ে এসেছে। তিন সঙ্গী-র তিনটি গল্পও এর ব্যতিক্রম নয়। নরনারী সম্পর্ক বিষয়ে রবীন্দ্রনাথ শেষজীবনে যা যা ভেবেছেন—কিছু ঘটনা আর চরিত্রকে ‘বানিয়ে’ তুলে তারই মধ্য দিয়ে সেই ভাবনাগুলিকে এখানে গল্পরূপ দেওয়া হয়েছে। (ঘোষ, ২০০১, ৩৬৭)

এ যেন ‘ফ্রয়েডের বুটজুতো’ পরা কল্লোল-গোষ্ঠীকে ‘আদর্শ-প্রেম’ শেখানোর এক রবীন্দ্র-প্রয়াস। মিটে যেত যদি এখানেই থেমে যেত গল্পটা, সহজ হত আমার মতো

সংস্কৃতি গবেষকের কাজ, হ্যাঁ-না-এর সহজ ছকে পড়ে ফেলা যেত এ আখ্যান। কিন্তু অত সহজ ব্যাপারটাকে রাখতে দেন না রবীন্দ্রনাথ।

জীবনের উপাস্তে পৌঁছে যখন বিশ্বভারতী থেকে শুরু হল তাঁর রচনাবলীর প্রকাশ, রচনাবলীর অন্তর্ভুক্ত বহু যুগ আগে ছাপা বইগুলির একটা করে নতুন ভূমিকা জুড়ে দিচ্ছিলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। ১৯০৩-এ প্রকাশিত *চোখের বালি*-র ১৯৪১-এ লেখা ‘সূচনা’-য় জানালেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ এ গ্রন্থে নাকি “সাহিত্যের নবপর্যায়ের পদ্ধতি” মেনে “আঁতের কথা বের করে দেখানো”-ই ছিল তাঁর উদ্দেশ্য। জানালেন তিনি,

নামতে হল মনের সংসারের সেই কারখানা-ঘরে যেখানে আগুনের জ্বলুনি হাতুড়ির পিটুনি থেকে দৃঢ় ধাতুর মূর্তি জেগে উঠতে থাকে। মানববিধাতার এই নির্মম সৃষ্টিপ্রক্রিয়ার বিবরণ তার পূর্ব গল্প অবলম্বন করে বাংলা ভাষায় আর প্রকাশ পায় নি। (ঠাকুর, ১৩৯২, ৮৩-৮৪)।

আরও একধাপ এগিয়ে ১৯০৬-এ প্রকাশিত *নৌকাডুবি*-র রচনাবলী সংস্করণের ‘সূচনা’-য় তাঁর মৃত্যুর বছর, ১৯৪১-এ লিখলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ,

গল্প লেখার পেয়াদা যখন দরজা ছাড়ে না তখন দায়ে পড়ে ভাবতে হল কী লিখি। সময়ের দাবী বদলে গেছে। একালে গল্পের কৌতুহলটা হয়ে উঠেছে *মনোবিকলনমূলক*। ঘটনা-গ্রন্থন হয়ে পড়েছে গৌণ। তাই অস্বাভাবিক অবস্থায় মনের রহস্য সন্ধান করে নায়ক-নায়িকার জীবনে প্রকাণ্ড একটা ভুলের দম লাগিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছিল—অত্যন্ত নিষ্ঠুর কিন্তু ঔৎসুক্যজনক। (ঠাকুর, ১৩৯২, ১৬৫)

এমনকি যখন ইংরিজি ভাষাতেও ফ্রয়েড অনুবাদ হতে বছর চারেক বাকি সেই ১৯০৬-এ বাঙালির গল্পের কৌতুহলটা হয়ে উঠেছিল, ‘মনোবিকলনমূলক’, এবং সে কৌতুহল সম্পর্কে সম্পূর্ণ সচেতনও ছিলেন তিনি—এমনটাই রবীন্দ্রনাথের দাবি। একে নেহাৎই ‘অবচেতনার অবদান’ ছাড়া আর কী বা বলা যেতে পারে।

এ দাবীকে খুব অসঙ্গত আর বলা যায় না যখন দেখি সুদূর ভিয়েনায় বসে ফ্রয়েড লিবিডোর তত্ত্বায়নের ঢের আগে প্রবৃত্তিকে জীবনের চালিকা শক্তি রূপে চিনতে পেরেছিলেন। বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষকের উপলব্ধিহীন ধার করা তত্ত্ব প্রয়োগের চেষ্টার বিরুদ্ধে তাঁর প্রতিরোধের রাজনীতিও অস্পষ্ট থাকে না।^১ কিন্তু যা প্রকৃত কৌতুহলদীপক তা হল শেষ বয়সে ফ্রয়েডীয় বিজ্ঞান নিয়ে তাঁর কৌতুকদীপ্ত ক্রীড়া,

ও তার পাশাপাশি ফ্রয়েডীয় ব্যাকরণে নিজেকে দুরন্ত প্রমাণের প্রয়াস। এর পশ্চাতে ক্রিয়াশীল কোন ‘অবচেতনার অবদান’ আপাতত সেটাই সব থেকে জরুরী প্রশ্ন।

টীকা :

- ১। ১৯১৭ সালেই মনঃসমীক্ষণকে পাঠক্রমের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করেছিলেন কলিকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের এক্সপেরিমেন্টাল সাইকোলজি বিভাগের অস্থায়ী শিক্ষক গিরীন্দ্রশেখর বসু। গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের উদ্যোগে জনপরিসরে মনঃসমীক্ষণের ‘প্রচার ও প্রসার’-এর উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে ১৯২২-এ যাত্রা শুরু করেছিল ভারতীয় মনঃসমীক্ষণ সমিতি। ইউরোপীয় বিদ্যায়তনিক ক্ষেত্র যখন মনঃসমীক্ষণকে বিজ্ঞান বলে মেনে নিতেও প্রস্তুত নয়, সময় মনঃসমীক্ষণকে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের পাঠক্রমের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করার মত আশ্চর্য কৃতিত্ব বাঙালি অর্জন করলেও মনঃসমীক্ষণের জনক সিগমুন্ড ফ্রয়েড যে ক্রম-সংস্কারের পথে আজীবন এগিয়ে নিয়ে চলেছিলেন এই বিজ্ঞান তার সাথে তাল রেখে বাঙালি মনঃসমীক্ষককে চলতে দেখা যায় না। প্রথম বিশ্বযুদ্ধের অভিজ্ঞতার পর খোদ সিগমুন্ড ফ্রয়েড ১৯২০-তে ঘোষণা করেন, মানুষের যাবতীয় প্রবৃত্তির তাড়না আদতে সুখের লাগি—তাঁর এই তত্ত্বে মস্ত ভ্রান্তি। শুধু রমন-তৃষা নয় মরণ-তৃষার দোলাও সমান দোদুল্যমান আমাদের মন। অথচ চারের দশকের শেষ অবধি ভারতীয় মনঃসমীক্ষকদের এই মরণতৃষা নিয়ে ভাবিত হওয়ার কোন প্রমাণ আমাদের চোখে পড়ে নি। রবীন্দ্রনাথের এই প্রতিরোধ আদতে এই স্বপ্ন কেন্দ্রিক মনঃসমীক্ষণ চর্চার প্রতি—এমনটাই আমাদের মনে হয়। গিরীন্দ্রশেখরের ও ভারতীয় মনঃসমীক্ষণ সমিতির ক্রিয়াকাণ্ডের বিস্তারিত বিবরণের জন্য বর্তমান লেখকের অপ্রকাশিত গবেষণা সন্দর্ভ *মনঃসমীক্ষণ ও বিশ শতকের আধুনিক বাঙালির মানস দ্বন্দ্ব*-এর দ্বিতীয় অধ্যায় দ্রষ্টব্য।

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Kiran Keshavamurthy

**TRUTH, HABIT AND LITERATURE –
SUNDARA RAMASAMI'S *J. J. : SOME JOTTINGS***

My task is to influence ideas at the root of all action. Without thoughts there can be no deeds. Anyone who has an impact upon ideas can in reality influence actions. By effecting a change in beliefs, mankind itself can be transformed. For this, man should learn to be truthful in all his relationships and interactions. Now, he has taken them for granted. So long as this hurdle remains, preaching will only slip in the moss of habit. A treacherous moss. Can a society, oblivious of copulation, but immersed in love, reproduce itself? Creation means a feel for truth. The mind needs to be turned towards a state of creativity. Man should be taught about himself. If man fails to understand himself, he cannot grasp even the soil under his feet. To desilt the wellspring of creativity is my task. (Ramasami 1981, 171)

Sundara Ramasami's Tamil novel *J.J.: Some Jottings (J.J.: Sila Kurippagal)* (1981) takes the form of a posthumous biography about a fictional Malayalam writer named J.J. (James Joseph) and, under the pretext of detailing an equally fictional Malayali literary world to a Tamil readership, satirizes the parochialism of Tamil culture and society. I suggest the novel's engagement with the cultural and linguistic differences between the Tamil and Malayalam literary worlds is only nominal, and illustrative rather of a fundamental or creative paradox between truth and habit, as embodied in J.J.'s character. In the above excerpt from his diary jottings, J.J. suggests the access to truth is enabled by effecting a conscious change in ideas and therefore action through creativity. Creativity that here

includes literature, is an embodied and self-reflexive disposition that can bring about a *feel* for the truth. Creative literature is thus identified as a habitual practice that becomes the experiential ground of truth. But the access to the truth is not, as J.J. suggests, direct or unmediated but unavoidably structured by habit, which then requires the repeated undoing of habit. The philosophical import of the narrative lies in the fact that man can never get rid of habits or the habit of forming habits that necessarily mediate his relationship to himself and to others. Habits effect the human engagement with the world in terms of thoughts, actions and choices in a paradoxical manner — they are on the one hand restrictive as they desensitize human consciousness to external impressions, even as they are liberating precisely when consciousness is freed of investment in any particular impression. In habit consciousness is simultaneously present and engaged and absent and indifferent to the subject at hand, giving the act of engagement a mechanical and natural effect (Malabou 2005, 57). The literary and aesthetic function of habit becomes important here. When the act of creativity becomes a habitual state or disposition, it becomes an ongoing movement of a self-differentiated subject towards an essential universal. The creative power of habit lies in its reiterative practices that enable the individual subject to potentially transcend (self) difference and attain the integrity of an ideal form or essence. Creative habit thus constantly reconfigures human subjectivity as an insistent accident in the process of becoming essential (Malabou 2005, 71). In mediating the binary between real and ideal, the contingent and the necessary, the habit becomes a virtual agent that invariably determines the potential choices that the subject makes in her journey to attain a certain ideal of truth. The habitual practice of creativity is then the means of experiencing truth while the experience of truth itself remains an experience that is beyond language and reason.

The Philosophy of Habit

Before exploring the central thematic of the novel a brief investigation of the philosophical trajectory of the habit is only in order. The

habit as laid out in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is a determinate state of character formed by training that gives rise to natural regularities in the individual's actions over time. For Aristotle, disposition (whether acquired or self-determined) and habitual action share a reciprocal relationship — habitual action helps create a moral disposition and the skills required to act according to specific circumstances, and moral skills in turn make habitual action easier and therefore more habitual. The formation of good habits according to Aristotle will naturally over time harmonize reason and passion so that one naturally feels pleasure in virtue and pain in vice.

In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, GWF Hegel emphasizes the dual principles of change and preservation that Aristotle formulates in his understanding of habit. For Aristotle, Hegel argues, habit is revealed as a principle of internal differentiation only in organic beings, which seek to maintain their unity through the synthesis of differences: difference between the organism and its surrounding environment and difference within the heterogeneous, elements that make up the organism. The organism is at once identical to and different from its non-living origins and environment. As sameness and alterity are interlinked in habit, habit becomes a process of adaptation in a double sense, as a form of what Aristotle calls *contemplation* — absorbing the environment, passively lending itself to what is given — and *exercise*, informing and transforming surroundings, appropriating the given conditions for its organic functions. The more complex and developed a living being is, the more it more it assimilates the inorganic environment into the infinite unity of subjectivity.

In the *Philosophy of Nature* Hegel draws a distinction between animal habits and human habits. Animals driven by their instinct for self-preservation acquire and inherit certain habits to adapt to their natural environment. They incorporate and immediately reflect their surroundings for their own survival without creating an imbalance in their environment. Through their habits animals overcome the contingencies of their environment and remain in a

necessary state of nature. Their bodily existence, which is a summation of the inorganic elements that make their surroundings, merely reflects their environment. And the only way individual animals reflect other animals that make up the genus is through reproduction. Humans on the other hand cannot be reduced to their instincts for self-preservation and reproduction. They do not immediately reflect their environment the way animals do because of their internally divided nature. The essential difference between animal habit and human habit lies in the tendency of human habit to conceal its identity as habit. The human being disavows her lack of self-sameness or, to use Hegel terms, the lack of correspondence between the exteriority or body and the interiority or soul. Language is fetishized as the human medium and instrument through which transparency is apparently achieved. The individual does not realize that she is already the object of multiple and even contradictory perspectives including her own that makes the truth of human nature a fantasy. Through the dialectical structure of habit that mediates the relationality between self and other the individual keeps shifting from one form of expression or signification to another. For Hegel habit is revealed as a process through which man ends by willing or choosing that which comes to him from the outside. He can only potentially arrive at the truth through the reiterative practices of habit that involves in Hegel's words, "a persistent involvement of his will...through concrete habits that in a single act combine multiple determinations of sensation, consciousness, intuition, understanding and so forth." (Hegel 1998, 230)

The ideal of truth however remains a potential ideal whose realization through habit would put an end to individual existence. Thus even if habit has a deadening effect on the human subject, it is a creative agent that by ever postponing realization spurs the individual to strive to realize her ideal aim. From Aristotle on the habit is understood as difference repeated and made productive connected to the very way of being itself. Habit has an ontological significance for Hegel that goes beyond the anthropological, directing

the subject dialectically towards an all encompassing and unified whole.¹

In Deleuze's study of David Hume's philosophy, *Empiricism and Subjectivity* habit is the very essence of human subjectivity and what Deleuze and Hume call the imagination. As a post-structuralist critique of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology, Hume's empiricism postulates a subject that unlike earlier postulations of the subject from Plato to Descartes is not an *a priori* subject but formed by and through experience. If knowledge is not derived from ideas in the mind that preexist experience, this does not imply as Deleuze suggests, that knowledge is passively derived from sensory impressions. The Humean subject according to Deleuze is constituted by what Hume calls the associative principles of human nature that are derived from and structure experience. Hume's empiricism revolves around a principle of difference that posits a dualism between things and relations where experience becomes meaningful only by the associative links that the mind creates between things. The very ability to structure experience through the mind's associative links that are external to the things themselves is itself a product of experience. The associative principles of human nature are natural and do not rely on *a priori* structures of experience. So for Hume and Deleuze the possibility of deriving a unified knowledge of the world is not based on the transcendental operation of mental categories but by the associative principles of human nature that through habit establish and reestablish in varying configurations new and different unities of the world. Thus Hume's empiricism has to be understood not as an unmediated and passive reception of sensory experience but as an iterative production of the subject and the given, and their relation through what Hume calls the extensive and corrective rules of the imagination. Both these rules find their origin in habit, whose function is to enhance the range of the imagination and constantly correct the imagination and the accuracy of judgment through the understanding. The traditional example that Deleuze cites is that of the balls on a pool table and the process of association that allows

a subject to form a relation of causality between one ball and the next, so that the next time one ball comes into contact with another, an expectation that the second ball will move is created. Thus any empiricist philosophy, as Deleuze argues, cannot be based merely on difference but requires difference and repetition to relate to each other reversibly. According to Deleuze there is no identity, and no repetition is ever the same. Thus habit is not self-repetitive but reiterative, in that with every 'repetition' something new and different is produced. Human subjectivity with every reiteration is never being but becoming. The displacement of the transcendental subject for Deleuze implies the displacement of all transcendentals in his works — questioning the supremacy of reason as the *a priori* privileged way of relating to the world, questioning the link between freedom and will, attempting to abolish dualisms from ontology, reinstating politics prior to Being. Unlike the Hegelian subject whose dialectical journey of becoming is determined by its mergence with an internally homogenous Whole, the Deleuzian subject is an indeterminable iterative process of identity and difference whose destination remains unknown. The protagonist of the following novel is truly a Deleuzian one to the extent that his ontological journey is an open ended one that entails the repeated assumption and denuding of habit.

The Narrative

J. J embodies a crisis in the circularity of habit and action and their easy correspondence to moral disposition. His constant predicament in the novel is his inability to determine whether his action is original or derived from habit. He is haunted by his inability to make choices and decisions that reduces him to an apparent state of paralysis. He claims in frustration that he is neither able to act with perfect conviction nor able to die. But his dilemma cannot be equated to inaction. The truth for J.J is potentially experienced precisely in the disjuncture between habit and action where the rejection of socially cultivated habits is estranging even as it opens a space for difference and newness. Every new reconfiguration of

the relation between thought, action and knowledge brings the subject potentially closer to the truth, which is identified with self-sameness. But self-sameness is an ever deferred ideal; the possibility of attaining this ideal by what is ostensibly original action is always already mired in habit that seeks to integrate particular interests into an artificial collectivity. If habit is a set of conventional and iterative practices that necessarily constitute the subject and her unified understanding of the world, such an understanding is contingent. The impasse between action and habit perpetuates J.J's journey towards the ideal of perfect unity; a journey that fuels his and indeed, man's struggle to transform and improve himself as he strives to approximate the truth. The path to this elusive ideal can never be predetermined and every attempt to approximate the truth results in a productive failure that produces new possibilities of being in the world.

The narrator bemoans J.J's exclusion from the rhetorical claims of Dravidian nationalism where Dravidian is equated with Tamil. But the unifying claims of Dravidian nationalism like any other form of cultural nationalism are as inclusive as they are exclusive. These partial claims also determine the politics of literary canon formation.

Some may wonder, was J.J a Tamil writer? How can his death be our loss? J.J's soul, though Dravidian, was not a Tamil one. Yet, he was an artist who used writing to seek insights. Isn't this important? Isn't this rare?

"Whosoever uses the letters, the arts, philosophy, science or religion (in these times, how can I include politics?) to seek one's inner light is one among us. He needs to be assimilated into our language and become a part of us. We should recognize this assimilation with ecstasy and think further – if we can think, and if we are so inclined. (Ramasami 1981, 13)

The predicament that drives the narrative and is figured by the narrator and J.J's character is the irresolvable slippage between repetition and difference that constitutes one's perception of experience.

As Deleuze notes in his work on Hume, the habit as convention is necessarily an exclusive basis for any institution and the attempt to make the institution more inclusive by correcting the habit that constitutes it would be transformative but also open up other exclusions. The interplay between repetition and difference as embodied by the narrator/biographer and J.J respectively becomes a narrative strategy that unfurls the human subject's open-ended journey towards truth and being. While the narrator embodies the unifying and repetitive practices of habit, J.J embodies a principle of difference that can be self-estranging even as it introduces novelty and creativity. The two characters thus function as antithetical correlates that make up the self-corrective structure of habit. The narrator's urge to include J.J among the list of great Tamil writers only reestablishes the exclusive literary conventions that underwrite the canon when J.J's crusade is precisely against the very idea of the habit or convention that only creates a necessary but synthetic sense of belonging and unity. His polemic against the institutionalization of literature is continuous with his individuating notion of truth that isolates him from society. In an imaginary footnote from his diary jottings alluding to his fallout with a contemporary philosopher who demolished his orthodox Christian background, the distinctness of the human being J.J suggests lies in his ability to overthrow untrue and outmoded social habits and practices.

Today's radical overtakes yesterday's radical. A religionist is one who believes himself to be the ultimate radical. Man is not just a living being. He is a different kind of a living being. Ever restless, he can never be cowed down. Never is he satisfied. (Ramasami 1981, 15)

Rather than embodying a distinct character J.J symbolizes man's restless journeying towards truth; a journey that constantly radicalizes the social and moral values attached to habit and custom. His narrative is itself a dramatization of the uneasy intimacy between identity and difference. As has been suggested earlier, the narrator

at various points in the book equates truth with stable and perfect identity. He tries to resolve the disparity between languages and literatures in a globalized world by ironing out all differences. He believes the invention of cultural forums that aim to correct or redress the disparity between languages and literatures will logically result in an even and honest exchange of ideas that over time will erase all difference. The narrator/biographer characterizes his book as a holistic response to the global asymmetry both among and between Indian languages and literatures. But this impulse to assimilate difference and impose an artificial ideal of cultural or even human identity conditions the possibility of its own fracture condemning man to an even greater sense of solitude.

Fifteen languages are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. When I asked some writers if they have ever seen the script of all these languages at least once, they all replied warily, "No". That I too hadn't did little to assure them...A person who knows of contemporary Italian writers is unaware of present day Kannada writers. A Hindi writer with a doctoral thesis on recent trends in American literature asks if there is New Poetry in Tamil

"For the last two decades I have argued that journals devoted exclusively to introducing the literature and culture of one linguistic group to another should be launched in all Indian languages.

"When I proposed starting a Tamil journal as part of this larger plan, one of my fellow writers asked, "Has any Tamil reader said he'll die if he couldn't read other literatures?" I felt slighted. I could've retorted, "So who's fasting, demanding that you write?" But that would have been the end of our friendship. With the words, "The right to express one's views is inalienable in the world of letters" he would cease to have any truck with me forever. In the present situation, if he too stopped speaking to me, I'd have to talk to myself.

"*J.J.: Some Jottings* are my response to this state of affairs" (Ramasami 1981, 16-17)

As I argued earlier, the reiterative structure of habit enables without completing the accidental subject's transformation into an ideal essence. Every transformation in the subject's understanding of the world preserves earlier transformations even as it paves the way for further change. The narrator aspires to unite all Indian languages and literatures despite their apparently nominal differences all of which can be reduced to a fundamental humanism. The essence of all Indian literature for the narrator is its humanism that overrides all other cultural and linguistic differences and habits.

Some may feel I am talking of writers and the world of letters of a different language. That's right. But not entirely so. Can we forget that our writers are a lot like other writers? The quality of their work may vary. But in their nature, in their practices, in their habits, in betraying others, in lobbying, are they not more or less the same? Even if we speak different tongues, are we not all Indians? Don't we have some common traits? Therefore you can take this to be a book on our writers also. Writers too are human beings, aren't they? Thus it is also a book on people. (Ramasami 1981, 18)

The narrator's unifying impulses are repeatedly undercut by the structural exclusions that constitute liberal universalist claims of cultural institutions to redress the uneven development of languages and literatures. The universal function of literature is to approximate the experience of truth which is however an individual and estranging enterprise. It becomes evident from the novel that the approach to truth may be subjective and determined by socially and historically embedded habits but truth itself is not a singular or universal essence with a particular value or referent. By the end of the novel it becomes clear to J.J. that the truth is precisely the irredeemable sense of lack and nothingness that reiterates and transforms human subjectivity. The ongoing quest for truth is thus a creative process in its unraveling of the internal differentiation that constitutes subjectivity. The production (and reception) of literature as one form of creative expression is an authenticating project that irrespective of its social

and historical context aims to constantly strip human nature of the moulds of habit and custom. For J.J literature is essentially historical and philosophical in its processes in that it symbolizes the “restless” human subject’s everlasting striving for truth in a postmodern world where there are no stable categories (Ramasami 1981, 15). The journey towards truth can never be anticipated or predetermined; truth comes to be articulated as an inexplicable, momentary experience of correspondence between thought and narrative that can never be captured by the temporality of literary meaning. In her orientation towards truth the subject realizes herself.

The associative principles of human nature according to Hume account not only for experience in the basic sense but also to the highest levels of cultural and social life. This is the basis for Hume’s rejection of a social contract model of society based on convention alone. Morals, feelings, bodily comportment — these elements of subjectivity are explained not by the transcendental structures but by the innate activity of association. Once the habitual structure of the self is in place, Deleuze argues, the Humean concept of belief comes into play, which is a central part of human nature. Belief describes a particularly human way of going beyond the given through habit. Thus for instance, one expects the sun to rise the next day not because one knows that but out of belief that is based on habit. This reverses the traditional hierarchy between knowledge and belief. Every act of belief is a practical application of habit without any reference to an *a priori* ability to judge. Thus every human being according to Deleuze’s reading is habitual but also creative even in the most mundane moments of his life.

The narrator’s beliefs are completely shattered by J.J’s polemic against social conventions like marriage. The novel traces the development in the narrator’s literary taste from cheap romantic serial novels to discovering J.J’s disillusioning attack on marriage. The narrator notwithstanding his awe and admiration for J.J. is initially unsettled by J.J’s ability to repeatedly strip the pretense

of the human world; to “erase the line between thoughts and the printed word” (Ramasami 1981, 19). Today’s modern writings, J.J. feels are “a mask that modern man wore to hide his dissatisfaction due to moral reasons” (Ramasami 1981, 19). The narrator’s response to J.J’s critique is one of fear and ecstasy — the fear of being stripped of the comfort of dreams and beliefs and the ecstasy of momentarily experiencing without being able to express the coincidence between experience and language. The joy of experiencing the unity of thought and language and narration in J.J’s writings is an embodiment of an ideal moment of truth and perfection that however is provisional in a world where all values and categories are in crisis. To protect himself from the crisis of meaninglessness, man constantly creates and rationalizes an imaginary world of make-belief and religious faith to serve his own interests. The breakdown of every belief and habit is only replaced by equally fragile and conventional beliefs and habits that reiterate the fact that man can neither give up the habit of forming habits to make sense of the world nor replacing those very habits in his longing for perfection. In the unrelenting creativity that characterizes the ability of the human imagination to go beyond the given, truth however momentary and provisional can only be an experiential category that is outside the realm of reason and representation. Towards the end of his diary notes, J.J suggests truth as perfection is precisely an inexplicable sense of nothingness; a lack of self-sameness that structures human subjectivity and meaning. But as J.J suggests man’s quest for truth is always threatened by the arbitrariness of beliefs and conventions that necessarily structure human perception.

Considering the burden of so many theories, it is little surprise that man seeks refuge in god, for a little faith always lurks behind rationalism. Behind every principled position lurks a personal interest revealing its real face. The intensity of the predicament tortures man which breaks down earlier beliefs. Afraid of plunging into nothingness, man embraces new beliefs in a make-believe of holism, closing his eyes to the shortcomings.

Tested against life, philosophical theories lose their sheen... Then the dressing up of philosophy. Man's desires, dreams and ideals, his struggle to see god in tangible form, in the embodiment of faith, in conformity with reason—poor man! He does not realize Life is not in the least obliged to ensure victory to truth-quests. It keeps circling in its endless cycle, indifferent to man's dreams, desires and struggles. Will its cycle and force ever be grasped by his intellect? (Ramasami 1981, 106)

But it is precisely this sense of nothingness that J.J in his diary notes does not equate with a void. This nothingness is a creative lack that reconfigures and reorients the subject towards a potential sense of truth and being. Truth is an ideal of perfection where all differences except for the difference between truth and untruth cease to be. Truth according to J.J is an index of man's nobility and a dream of perfection that inspires man to improve himself. One's faith in truth entails being true to oneself and hence to others, which for J.J presumes a historical erasure of differences between and within individuals; of all the different applications of habit—conventions, rules, beliefs, morality and political positions. A sincere faith in truth would put an end to all the rationalizations of habit to arrive at a state of holism; a state where the world is perfectly integrated. But if the achievement of such a state were possible it would end all human creativity that is forever aimed at self-transformation and transcendence.

Let me be branded with any name — Optimist or Nihilist, Progressive or Reactionary, Socially Constructive or Destructive. I need to reach a plane where all mean the same. One difference is crucial — that alone counts. Do I speak the truth, whether they call me a reactionary or an enemy of society or by any other such name, I am noble in myself... If, on the other hand, as a result of speaking falsely, acting at variance with my heart, indulging in flattery, betraying friends, following devious tactics, the society is to put me in an exalted position, I do not desire it... I do not speak out of arrogance.

I've numerous frailties. I struggle to overcome them... Mine is a journey... I don't seek perfection. I know I can't achieve it. There is no such thing as perfection. Whatever is, is struggle... a struggle for holism... This non-existent thing is the reason for all existence. Man's nobility is born from it. When man begins to think of this "nullity" as non-existence, he will descend to the level of beasts... Dreaming of perfection, man kept transforming his condition. To effect this transformation he dedicated himself, destroyed himself and in turn experienced the rapture of his own annihilation... History proclaims man's faith in perfection. (Ramasami 1981, 182-183)

The reiterative practices of habit are primarily exercised in language in all its forms. Language at once desensitizes human consciousness to impressions (where the subject is as Hegel argues at once present and absent in the subject at hand) through its recursive practices and enunciates different and newer ways of becoming. The act of writing for instance involves making choices within the limits of certain practices that both reinforce them and open up possibilities for freedom. On the one hand, the narrator aspires to forge an intellectual and spiritual relationship with J.J that transcends body and language, which according to the narrator has divided men and "enslaved man — who was born to be on the side of truth — to sound" (Ramasami 1981, 29). And yet language and literature are the only means through which even a sensory experience of truth is possible. In the latter half of the novel the narrator presents us with J.J's diary notes that he states form the preliminary basis for all his other writings. His notes capture sensory experiences in all their immediacy and the narrator admires his ability to go beyond national, linguistic and communal boundaries and unravel the fetters of religious thought and morality that impede human self-realization. Humans J.J suggests have been ironically forced to forsake their transparency because of religious morality. The chasm between man and life has been widened by the rut of "custom" and "habit" that conceals meaning and passes off as truth

(Ramasami 1981, 49). For J.J the journey to truth can never be predetermined; it only entails the repeated stripping of outmoded values and positions that no longer suit the needs of the contemporary world. The historical trajectory of truth has the ability to undo norms and disturb the peace and complacency of his readers. For instance, in another section of the novel, J.J critiques the synthetic humanism in the writings of a well known socialist writer Mullaikal Madhavan Nair. Beneath Nair's claims of portraying poverty in unsparing detail, the narrator feels Nair's "tactical" exclusions of certain details are meant to satisfy his readers (Ramasami 1981, 85). The synthetic humanism of Nair's writings are according to J.J only a reflection of his greed for money and fame and his failure to question his own fantastical world of make-belief. In a conversation with his professor Arvindaksha Menon, a mentor known for encouraging young writers to write in what was then a new realist mode, J.J. implicitly critiques Mullaikal Madhavan Nair's writings,

It is not the incident itself that counts...When a body functions without reflection, without sensitivity, in a hidebound manner, stupidly, like a storehouse of reflex actions, everything becomes just an incident. The mechanical response of mere reflection. What is action anyway? Is it my own action or is it just a habit others instilled in me? Reflecting on these lines, philosophical issues take precedence over incidents. (Ramasami 1981, 81)

As mentioned earlier, what distinguishes animal from human habit for Hegel is that the latter conceals its identity as habit, passing off as original. The repetitive practices of habit deaden human sensitivity to impressions so that human consciousness is at once indifferent and engaged in the world. If habit enables certain seemingly spontaneous forms of reflex action, original action requires a constant reorientation of the self towards itself and its relation to the world. Action and habit share an uneasy correlation from the above quote. J.J's predicament lies in being

unable to be entirely convinced of the originality of his action that is always already determined by habit and custom. And yet although there is no non-habitual behavior or practice, in that habit constitutes the subject's orientation to the world, action cannot be reduced to ritual for there to be some possibility of self-transformation. There is thus a slippage between action and habit that can affect change only through constant self-awareness and deliberation. J.J's reflection on the inexplicable phenomenon of change suggests habit, as Aristotle and Hegel emphasize, is a cumulative process of adaptation and development which preserve earlier modifications that condition future transformation. Thus being a witness to the experience of change is crucial to the undoing of habit and artifice:

"Right in the middle stands a huge neem tree...

"Without giving a close look, it would be chopped down but if one observed it closely, you would not dream of chopping it. As a protest against a mentality that destroys without a second thought, this tree should remain even after this area is turned into a park complete with a climbing frame for children...

"I also have philosophical reasons, pertaining to aesthetics and life preservation, for keeping this solitary tree alive. If I become a king, I transform this spot. After the transformation, where is the evidence for such a transformation? Isn't the experience of the transformation, the only trace of it? If there is no experience where then is change?

"You may ask, aren't there men? What about their experience? Plants are superior witnesses to men. For that reason too, the tree should remain." (Ramasami 1981, 82)

In another instance, J.J is struck by the mechanical expression of pity on a leprous beggar's face. He imagines the various reactions the disabled leper could have to the money he has to offer but nothing prepares him for the leper's sudden securing of the coin with his toe when J.J tries to help him. J.J realizes no action or

decision can ever be wholly predetermined by habit or deliberation particularly when the habits of others are involved. He can never completely control any circumstance or event on the basis of his own conviction when the other has not been considered. Later he agonizes to Aravindaksha Menon over the impossibility of escaping habit,

I have become incapable of thought and at arriving at decisions. To act is beyond me. I hate habit. But I die over and over again due to habit. All the thought of the world until now, its nobility, its unbounded capacities, has given me nothing. I, for my part, do not possess the strength to make anything of my own. (Ramasami 1981, 87)

The Professor suggests the only way of breaking out of habit is “destroying one’s self in thinking, can truth be touched, felt...” (Ramasami 1981, 87). In other words, as long as one exists one is habituated to act in a certain way. The only resort for J.J is to opt out of an existence where he can be free of habit or indulge in a self-effacing act of creativity that enables self-transformation and transcendence. What was earlier a strictly individual enterprise of seeking truth becomes a selfless one that relocates the ‘self’ from the confines of individualism to a relationality with others where truth can be potentially experienced. Truth lies in the destruction of self-love and empathy; in mutual esteem that integrates particular and partial sympathies to produce a holistic sense of the truth where differences cease to matter. J.J alludes to the game of football where what is important is not winning or losing but participating with the greatest conviction. The ball he says does not belong to any one player but to the team and it is the dynamic and involved relationality between players that can create an experience of truth, however momentary, that cannot be captured by language and representation. It is the institutionalization of the sport that J.J claims has ruined the dynamic relational aspect of the game by imposing rules and restrictions. The importance of destroying the self by indulging in creative activity becomes evident in J.J’s passing

engagements with carpentry, fishing, photography and painting. His decision against his family’s wishes to study law to indulge in non-professional forms of creative and intellectual activity again reflects the importance of aesthetic expression as an end in itself in redeeming a dead life of habit. Creative activity when not determined by institutional considerations of utility offers the “ecstasy” of experiencing truth.

The narrator identifies with his bedridden mother whose sickness compels her to stick to intellectual forms of work like writing. When he compares his parents he believes people like his mother would form the basis for a truly noble society based on humility and honesty. Although he imbibes his “morality, and belief and discipline” from his father who has no worldly attachments or needs, he describes his mother as someone who is neither pretentious nor fully affectionate to those she helps. She is “forever active and guilty” and “dreams of the future to bear her current misery” (Ramasami 1981, 180). It is his mother’s ability to dream; to have faith in a better future even in her current misery while silently empathizing with others in the present that make her the basis of a noble society. Individuals like her can create an unspoken sense of understanding and empathy that renders language and meaning inadequate and superfluous.

Towards the end however J.J longs to be freed of all relations and embraces death when he realizes nothing can offer a permanent antidote to habit. Like everyone he is bewildered by the empirical world that in its many facets is inexhaustible in its wonders and inscrutable, “Our bewilderment dulls our sensibilities and fools our minds into being machines of habit” (Ramasami 1981, 67). When the narrator discovers J.J is dying he realizes all great writers have been responsible for hastening “little deaths to kill the body on an everyday basis” (Ramasami 1981, 65). He wonders if their short lives have something to do with their inability to countenance the loss of their selves in their struggle to live.

In conclusion, the deadlock between action and habit has to be repeatedly undone precisely through certain relational acts of

creativity that constantly renew the human relationship to the self and to others. Creativity offers the possibility of constantly reconfiguring the habitual structures of understanding and thus the human orientation towards truth. Literature is one among other creative acts that through language ironically constitutes the experiential grounds of truth that cannot be captured within the significatory structures of reason and meaning. If norms, rules and habits or conventions are necessary to crystallize meaning, literature has the power to undo all of them and constantly recreate an understanding of truth that in the novel shifts from being a primarily individual enterprise to a shifting relational act of aesthetic expression. Truth is thus a temporal and historical category that is constantly re-experienced by reconfiguring the relationality between self and other in creative practice.

NOTES:

1. In her reading of habit in Hegel, Catherine Malabou approximates the Hegelian subject to the Deleuzian where subjectivity is a non-teleological process of dispersion driven by the interplay of identity and difference. I however wish to suggest that Hegelian dialectics on the contrary is a totalizing teleological project that traces the processual subject's ultimate arrival to an all encompassing and unifying Whole.

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Avishek Ray

**PRE-HISTORY OF THE ‘FOLK’:
A CASE OF BANGLA LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY¹**

A significant development in contemporary literary-cultural studies has been the emergence of the notion of modernities and modernisms in the plural. While acknowledging the importance of modernity and modernism for literary analysis, poststructuralist theorists, in particular, have rejected singular definitions of these terms as an illegitimate and overtly restrictive projection of models derived from western European experience onto areas of the world where they may not apply. As an alternative, they have often approached modernity and modernism in a global and comparative fashion stressing multiple, disjunctive temporalities, and multiple vernacular iterations. This explains the foundation of the ‘folk’ as a distinct cultural form and, ever since, its functioning as a legitimate academic discipline. The jargon ‘folk’, or for that matter folk theatre, folk literature, folk music etc., is laden with so much cultural baggage that it is now a *naturalized* concept within contemporary academics so much so that we never question its ‘order of things’. The aim of this paper is two-fold: first, to genealogically trace the inception of the ‘folk’ and then demonstrate how the idea is appropriated into the discourse of Bangla literary history. Who were the chief proponents of the construction of the ‘folk’? Why was the category set up in the first place? What is the ‘telos’ of this dividing practice? Which politico-historical milieu allowed this ambiguous polarization between the ‘folk’ and ‘non-folk’? And finally, what implications did the birth of the ‘folk’ have in the way the nineteenth century Bengali intelligentsia – grappling with

the utility of the ideas of ‘foreign’ modernisms – fashioned their ‘very own’ literary historiography?

This paper, therefore, problematizes the model of Bangla literary historiography with reference to how it perceives the ‘folk’. The ‘folk’ is certainly not an *universalizable* category; it is perceived differently by different people across different time and place. This paper studies two historians of Bangla literature, namely Dineshchandra Sen (1866-1939) and Sukumar Sen (1900-1992), to illustrate how their gaze towards ‘folk’ differed fundamentally, and how each represents his ‘structure of feeling’ that (re)shapes his understanding of ‘folk’. This paper points to how the time and place they belonged to, their socio-political commitments, their dispositions of taste and so on - the ‘habitus’ in Bourdieu’s expression - bear upon the reception of ‘folk’ as a category in their discourse. They have contentious, rather competing, views on ‘folk’, nevertheless they use folk as an apparatus to grapple with colonial modernity.

Sumanta Banerjee (1998, 14) shows how obsessed Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was with distinguishing between the *Baiji* and the *Khemta* dance forms. He took it upon himself to establish the superiority of *Baiji* dance, which he viewed as a derivative of the north Indian classical music tradition, over *Khemta* dance, which for him, comprised nothing more than ‘abominable contortions of the middle part of the body’. Indeed in the nineteenth century, there was this burning desire within the Bengali cultural sphere to clinically sanitize the ‘folk’ elements and (re)evaluate their importance or lack thereof in the collective cultural history. No wonder when the history of Bengali literature was being canonized, historians were totally judgmental, and more often than not had contradictory assessments of the worth of the ‘folk’, but all necessarily assumed the category ‘folk’ as an *apriori* – not only because even in rendering a vernacular history they chose a historiographic model that was inherently western, but also because ‘folk’ functioned as a counter-construct upon which the ‘modern’ Bengali *self* during the colonial encounter could be mounted. The task of the paper, therefore, is to study the historiography and register the voices of difference and

discontent, and/or those that are silenced by it, and to understand the stakes involved therein.

The trajectory of inception of the 'folk' as a category can be traced to the germination of Romanticism. Following the Industrial Revolution, the relationship between the rural and the urban, hitherto complementary, was readily turning conflictual. The 'city' boomed as a massive expansionary force devouring the rural traditions:

urban life penetrates peasant life, dispossessing it of all its traditional features: crafts, small centers which decline to the benefit of urban centers...Villages become ruralized by losing their peasant specificity. (Lefebvre 1996, 119)

The 'disenchantment' following the Industrial Revolution fuelled in some the desire to search for a *reality* uncontaminated by industrial capitalism and its subsequent discontentment. They were determined to find human beings still in the 'raw/ natural/ organic' state. (Caudwell 1937, 86-89) Although Herder is known to have used terms such as *Volkslied* (folksong), *Volksseele* (folk soul) and *Volks Glaube* (folk belief) as early as the late eighteenth century; and had his famous anthology of folksongs, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* published in 1778-79, *folkloristics/folklore* as an academic discipline did not emerge until much later. The Grimm brothers published the first volume of their much-celebrated *Kinder und Hausmärchen* in 1812 while the English word *folklore* was coined by Thoms in 1846. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, national folklore societies – the English Folklore Society (1878) and the American Folklore Society (1888) – were already established and the idea of folk(lore) was seemingly associated with a nostalgic 'reinvention' of the past. (Bascom 1977)

The idea of folklore, if not the term, evolved as the dark side of the Enlightenment, as the contrast to the new ideals to which the age aspired. As Schutze (1921, 118) points out succinctly: "Rationalism 'regarded the folk and its creative, especially literary, products with contempt and derision, as lacking in refinement, learning, mastery of diction, and subtleness and elevation of thought'. Romanticism, though directed towards a complete reversal

of Rationalist aesthetics, did not altogether reject the purported binary between literature per se and folk-literature. Following Rousseau², and more closely his teacher Hammann, Herder idealized the *yet-to-be-civilized* 'natural man', and admired his poetic expression, what he loosely called *Volklitteratur*, *Volks poesie*, and *Natur poesie*, as "the *highest* degree of harmony between the personality of the individual author, his subject, and the collective personality of his native audience or ethnic environment...the *highest* type and the final standard of all poetry." (cited in Schutze, 1921: 119)

Thus, Herder set up the conceptual framework within the grid of which the idea of 'folk' would henceforth always be invoked in relation to the 'high-or-low' metaphor, but would in any case be non-integrable into literature per se, as became all the more evident with the *literarization* of 'folk' elements. This is because *literarization* functions on a classist paradigm perpetuating social differentiation: between the affluent and the indigent, the rulers and the ruled, the urban and the rural, the ones with leisure time and those without etc³. The social hierarchy that results from such a development then serves as a metaphor for the valuation of its products: the *literarized* products become analogous to respective social positions.

The difficulty in the various nineteenth century usages of the term 'folk' lay in the fact that it was inevitably defined as a *dependent* rather than an *autonomous* entity. In other words, 'folk' was defined in contrast with or in opposition to some other population group and more importantly 'civilization' – it was (as if) the uncivilized element in a civilized society! The 'folk', in contrast to the elites, was understood as a group of people who constituted the lower stratum – the so-called 'vulgus in populo' – living on the margins of civilization and generally to be equated with the concept of peasant(ry). Let me illustrate the nineteenth century view of the folk and folklore by citing one of its most eloquent spokesmen, Andrew Lang:

There is a form of study, Folklore, which collects and compares the similar but *immaterial* relics of old races, the surviving superstitions and stories, the ideas *which are in our time but*

not of it. Properly speaking, folklore is only concerned with legends, customs, beliefs, of the Folk, of the people, of the classes which have least been altered by education, which have shared least in progress. But the student of folklore soon finds that these unprogressive classes retain many of the beliefs and ways of savages...This folklore represents, in the midst of the civilised race, the savage ideas out of which civilisation has been evolved. (1884, 11, 25; italics mine)

In *The Handbook of Folklore*, Burne's (1914, 2) definition of 'folk' is: "(T)he generic term under which the traditional Beliefs, Customs, Stories, Songs and Sayings current among *backward peoples* (sic.), are comprehended and included." Foster (1953, 159-73); he however goes on to sharpen the urban-rural/ civilized-savage distinctions in suggesting that folk society is not even a 'whole' society, not isolate in itself; it is rather 'a half society', a part of a larger unit (usually a nation) of the urban upper class. Precisely because 'folk' was defined primarily with respect to its supposed relationship to the *civilized* elite, folklore existed only because the latter existed! Bandyopadhyay (1995, iv, 12) points out that the very existence of 'folklore' is virtually a 'myth' – 'true and unreal' at the same time – 'true' because the folk/ non-folk binary *truly* exists within the matrix of hierarchal society as a projection of the super-ordinate's gaze and 'unreal' because its existence cannot be *naturalized* unless defined from the *outside*.

This idea of the 'folk' had immediate resonance in colonial India. The xenophobic colonizers had differentiated themselves from the colonized through the rhetoric of deictic categories: 'we' and 'they' wherein 'they' simply meant inferior, primitive, savage etc. (Said 1978; 1984; 1993) Now, Chatterjee (1997) has argued how the emerging nationalist discourse of the late nineteenth century led to the formation of an 'inner domain' insulated from the overwhelmingly racist 'outer domain' still coping hard with the changing face of colonial 'modernity'. For the Indian elites who always predominated the understanding of nationalist politics, and undisputedly accepted the colonizers' ushering in of all 'progressive' doctrines, the repertoire of the 'folk' functioned since the late

nineteenth century as the site upon which their severe 'castration anxiety' could be negotiated⁴. In a desperate attempt to buttress their disempowerment they virtually turned internal colonizers and shored up as the 'you', the intermediary collaborators in between 'we' and 'they'. The Indian elites, however, were caught in a serious dichotomy: whether to discount and erase the *non-modern* 'folk' elements from their cultural history in the Rationalist fashion towards embracing western 'modernism' (the *Anglicist* position), or to showcase the same as tokens of cultural differences in the Romantic way towards a 're-generation'¹⁹ of their ethnic past (the *Orientalist* position). In either case, it calls for the archiving of documented history. Whether or not one finds room for 'folk' within that 'grand narrative' would be an issue of serious contestation.

Some historians and literary critics alike have tended to view eighteenth century Indian literature as pedantic, degenerate and decadent:

The literature which was produced in these decadent times suffered from all ills society was heir to. Its poetry was dilettantish, weighed with euphemism and conceit. Its spirit was shackled by artificial limitations of rhyme, and its mood alternated between the sensuous and the spiritual, neither deeply experienced. Clouds of pessimism and despair hung over it. It sought rest in flight from reality. (Tarachand, cited in Panikkar 1995, 41)⁵

This view is one-sided and undermines the developing trends in Indian literature during the pre-colonial era. In fact, eighteenth century literature registered a shift, both in form and content, towards 'popular' literature from the eloquently verbose Sanskrit tradition of the earlier times. Whether or not one looks at this as decadence reflects more on the position of the onlooker than the literature itself. Hermann Goetz (1938, 6-7) argues that political instability in eighteenth century India, for that matter, never signalled an overall decline in culture:

For those symptoms of decadence which have been made a reproach to eighteenth-century India, are clearly discernible in

all those times which we consider as glorious periods in the history of other peoples...Can we forget the Golden age of Urdu, Bengali and Marathi literature? Can we doubt the high accomplishment of the music and dancing of those times? Or the refinement of social life and the important position of women in that society? Must we not come to the conclusion that the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been a period not only of political and economic decline, but also of highest refinement of Indian culture?

With the process of vernacularization steadily gained ground during this period, themes and diction pertaining to upper-class princely courts gave way to that concerning the ordinary individual⁶. Purists have understandably viewed this shift as decadence on the one hand while the Orientalists, on the other, held a contrary viewpoint. These divergent stances were reflected prominently when it came to the task of historicizing Bangla literature which Dineshchandra and Sukumar Sen, respectively spearheading two canonical but rival schools, saw as an exercise to (re)invent a presentable past for the Bengali people.

Literature or literary history is very much an aspect of the larger cultural history of the people at a particular time and place. These narratives, woven carefully and more often than not manipulatively, are geared towards formulating a desired sense of identity among societies, people, race, culture etc. Events of the past do not intrinsically make sense in/by themselves unless they are narrativized in a meaningful way. In other words, they only acquire meaning in the light of what comes prior to or after them and when the historian, who is virtually a story-teller, arranges and links these matrix of events⁷. Debunking the truth claims generally associated with historical narratives, post-structuralist theories have warned us to take those claims always with a grain of salt, not because they are necessarily false but because they come with “self-referential, problematical expression of interests – an ideological-interpretative discourse.” (Jenkins 1997, 6) Historical narratives, therefore, far from being non-fictional, objective and scientific, are rather “metahistorical construction, like all constructions, ultimately [an] arbitrary way of carving up what comes to constitute

its field” (ibid., 8). In the same light, all histories of literatures are narratives of a similar kind: imaginative in form of writing and involving seemingly seamless mediation and implicit manipulation by and for certain ‘imagined communities’, they are rather attempts at retrieving and representing a canon that would meet the requirements of changing historical periods. Therefore, what needs asking at this point is: Why did the historians of Bangla literature narrativize ‘folk literature’ in the way they did?

In fact, Bhattacharya (1975, 1) observes that attempts to write the history of Bangla literature predate actually, and indeed quite astonishingly, all attempts to write a general history of the Bengalis. Kasiprasad Ghosh’s essay ‘Bengali Works And Writers’ – not an exhaustive survey by any means, but a cursory overview of the history of Bangla literature so far and the first work of its kind – was published in the *Literary Gazette* in 1830. Two incredibly interesting points to note in the context of this work are: one, that the first history of Bangla literature was actually written not in Bangla, but in English; and second, that Ghosh’s concern for canonizing ‘Bangla literature’ does not adequately deal with the question of who (he understands) a Bengali is. Different people have different perceptions of Bengali(ness) depending on whether one considers it a linguistic, or cultural-ethnic, or a geo-political entity or a combination of all. But, in a pedagogic environment where Bangla was increasingly being rendered irrelevant, the task for Ghosh, understandably, was to showcase before the colonizers (therefore in English) *his* language even before starting to chisel out (racially) the ‘Bengali’ based on any exclusionary principle.

‘What we consider immoral today’, writes Rangalal Bandopadhyay defending Bharatchandra Roy (and his poetry) against charges of obscenity, ‘could have been quite moral at another time’ (cited in Bhattacharya 1975, 8-9). This short piece titled ‘Bangala Kabita Bisayaka Prabandha’ (An Essay On Bangla Poetry) was actually written for a speech delivered at a meeting at the Bethune Society in May, 1852. This is acknowledged as the first secondary piece in Bangla on Bangla literature. While reminding readers that literary

practitioners necessarily work within and cater to contemporary 'horizon(s) of expectation' and therefore works of literature are indicative of the taste of the society in general rather than of the individual litterateur, Rangalal categorically remarked, quite daringly in public, that Shakespeare was no less 'obscene' than Bharatchandra. What Rangalal did, to sum it up, was to draw attention to the relative as well as transient nature of the value systems we deploy to evaluate literature(s). Rangalal's insight, though more than a century and half old, now seemingly similar to that of a cultural relativist, lays the grid for a better understanding of what is at stake in this paper. It points to the fact that right from the start historians of Bangla literature fixed a prohibitive gaze towards what ought to be included within (or excluded from) the 'order of things' of a canon they envisaged as 'Bangla literature'. Those invested in canonizing Bangla literary history, to be noted *a posteriori* to the inception of the 'folk', would thenceforth be divided into two distinct schools: one extending a receptive gaze towards the non-urban 'folk' components of Bangla literature; and the other thoroughly inhibitive about the same.

Tagore, in the first essay of his monograph *Loksahitya* (1961 [1907], 665-89), cites a very popular Bangla 'folk-rhyme', and discusses its content. Featured therein is the acute pain of a family parting with a daughter, a young girl who, newly married according to the Bengali customs, is about to leave for her in-laws place. There is a parallelism in the narrative structure of the rhyme: the first lines of the couplets depict how desperately a particular character is weeping/crying while the seconds explicates his/her relationship with the bride. When he comes to describing the girl's sister, it appears as if he stumbles for a moment. He candidly apologizes beforehand 'lest the readers accuse him' for he is about to say something 'obscene'. The sister of the bride, now weeping by the bed, had earlier, in a petty household fight with the girl, said something so 'indecent' that Tagore, in having to quote her, is 'ashamed to utter it in the refined society.' "The expression," he says, "is obscene, but I cannot completely delete it because it is touchy. I shall rather translate the slang into decent language without

disturbing the rhyme scheme." (ibid., 682-83) Tagore thus re-casts the rhyme catering to the 'refined' taste of the class he represented. However, the 'slang' he seems so embarrassed to utter is *bhatarkhaki* (>bhatar+khaki), literally meaning one who eats up (>khaki) her husband (>bhatar), conventionally meaning a notorious woman. Interestingly, the word has its etymological root in the Sanskrit word *Bhrtri*, meaning husband (c.f. Bhrtrihari). And, curiously enough it was still very much in use and had currency in 'popular'/'mass' parlance. Girishchandra Ghosh (1844-1912), who is almost a senior-contemporary of Tagore, and used to live barely a few miles from Tagore's ancestral home, quite casually used this phrase in his play *Karmeti Bai* (1895).

Tagore's is as if the conscientious voice of the nineteenth century Bengali *bhadralok* (gentry), obsessed with Victorian purity, that rendered irrelevant those assorted chunks of their heterogeneous past that the latter chose to disown and that perhaps still inescapably overwhelms the contemporary voices that are emblematic of Bengali intellectuality⁸. The legacy of a *gentleman's* intervention to sanctify the unrefined, un(der)-cultured elements in the course of Bangla literature had however set in prior to Tagore. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, while introducing an anthology of the poems of Ishwar Gupta (1812-1860) that he had edited, blatantly writes, 'Ishwar Gupta is pious, but a backdated Bengalee, *therefore* his poems are obscene...Readers, however, won't find any obscenity in these poems. *We* have censored it all and published those with a gloss. Some were so obscene that they had to be left out completely.' (1939, 129,131) Chattopadhyay's argument simply leaves us clueless. The phrase 'therefore' indicates a sense of implicit *teleology*: it assumes an *essentializable* causal relation between 'backdatedness' and 'obscenity' albeit given that neither of the two is static (c.f. Rangalal). Secondly, who is he sharing allegiance with under the guise of the seemingly neutral pronoun 'we'? Of which 'we' does his voice act an agent?

The colonial exposure during the nineteenth century vectored in within the 'enlightened' English-educated elitist Bengalis what

Kosambi (1962) calls a 'creative introspection': a desire to first tally with the epistemological legacy set forth by the West and then determine on the basis of it what could be deemed fit for sharing allegiance with or not. This fostered a gate-keeping attitude, an inhibitory mindset based on an exclusionary principle determined entirely by the extent of colonial exposure or the lack thereof. The writing of the history of Bangla literature was a milestone in the same direction: it comprised parallel histories of erasure and retrieval, with some getting rid of elements they did not see quite fitting into the canon they were upto building and others counterposing the same elements to assert their marginalized identity. It pertains to both that 'how one [read: the historian] construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future' (Weinreich & Saunderson 2004, 120).

The first compendium on the history of Bangla literature is Dineshchandra Sen's (1866-1939) magnum opus: *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* which appeared in 1896. Both his *History of Bengali Language and Literature* and *Banga Sahitya Paricaya* were published in 1914. On the other hand, Sukumar Sen produced his *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa* during 1940 and 1956. In the limited scope of this paper I have considered Dineshchandra Sen and Sukumar Sen only. Both are crucially important figures when it comes to the history of Bangla literature, not because they are purportedly the most authentic, but because they spearheaded, respectively two different schools of historiography into which the rest of their counterparts can easily be clubbed. Dineshchandra and Sukumar are perhaps two flagposts – 1896 and 1956 being two bracketing moments in the history of Bangla literary historiography – prior to the former 'exclusionary' history was never felt to be written and after the latter no historian could ever avoid its trope. For that matter, there is no 'folk literature' whatsoever in 'pre-modern' Bangla literature prior to the colonial contact. It is basically the desire to re-orient Bangla literature based on the Eurocentric historiographic model – in which the Ancient Ages stand for glory, the Medieval for darkness

and the Modern for Enlightenment⁹ – that gave rise to a tendency in the historians of Bangla literature to scrutinize 'folk literature' as a distinctly separate generic category.

Dineshchandra traveled far and wide in (undivided) rural Bengal determined to collect ancient, 'pre-modern' manuscripts - of different genres and various dialects - that were lying scattered and unappreciated. He explains, in a very humble and non-ambitious tone, why and how he decided to write a history of Bengali literature:

Suddenly (while writing an article on the origin of Bengali language) I got hold of an ancient hand-written manuscript of *Mrigalubdha* by Ratideb and I came to know from some authentic sources that many such manuscripts were lying ignored and unpublished in the rural interiors of Tripura and Chattogram. [Thus] I traveled extensively and discovered many ancient and-written manuscripts of texts...This is exactly when I determined to write a detailed history of Bengali language.' (1986, [16])

On the same note, he expresses his anxiety over the fact that these manuscripts unless properly archived might fade into oblivion, and the 'modern' Bengalis of future generation might as well feel ashamed (read: like Tagore) of these at some point. While he mentions that he is aware that one may question the 'literary' worth of these little-known manuscripts, he clarifies why they needed to be archived:

It is true that the old Bengali literature in its primitive stages is permeated by a *rustic element*; but no apology, I think, is needed on our part for this. This is true of all other literary languages of the world in the early periods of their growth. If some of the earlier Bengali poems occasionally show a *coarse humor*, [they also express] the real poetry of the race, being an expression of hearts that beat with the true emotion of the *country-folk*. (Sen, D. 1914, [12]; translated by and cited in Sengupta, M. 1995, 62; italics mine)

Dineshchandra literally ‘discovers’ manuscripts and has no inhibition in including them in his *canon* of Bangla literature. While on the one hand he is sure about the ‘archival value’ of what he discovers, his rhetoric – ‘rustic element’, ‘coarse humor’, ‘country-folk’ etc — clearly points to the ‘inferior’ literary quality of ‘pre-modern’ Bangla literature and is indicative of him having internalized the western value-system inherent in the discourse of ‘folk’. But how do we explain the apparent contradiction of him archiving something he already knows is quite ‘inferior’? Dineshchandra sees ‘Bengali literature in its primitive stages...[to be] in the early periods of...growth’ and has completely given in to the logic of *historical progression* – the trope of what Foucault (1970) calls the ‘increasing formalization of knowledge’ – and his project is understandably one of *historically* recording Bangla literature *grow* from *primitivity* to *modernity*, from *rusticity* to *Enlightenment*. Dineshchandra envisaged the Bengalis, already outpowered by the colonizer in all aspects of the ‘outer domain’, at least as shoring up in respect to the ‘inner domain’ banking on their cultural indigeneity. Dineshchandra wanted to *invent* and equip the Bengalis with a *past*, no matter how ‘rustic’ it be, within which they could – re-inscribe their racial identity later. Nearly fifty years later when Sukumar Sen wrote *his* history, the canon of Bangla literature had already been established. So his endeavor was more about (re)evaluating the canon than *inventing* it. ‘The purpose of the present work’, writes Sukumar Sen (1962, Preface) as a rationale for writing history:

...is *objectively* and chronologically to describe the history of Bengali literature. Without minimizing the importance of earlier research in this area, it should be admitted that those were either *incomplete* or *subjective*. An *imperfect understanding of the history of the land* may be one of the reasons for this defect of our earlier historians. The truth is that it is totally imaginary to divide Bengali literature or Bengal into periods like Buddhist, Brahmanical, etc. It should also be mentioned at the very outset that I have not followed *the order of English*

literary histories, because pre-modern Bengali literature is simply a repetitious narrative, it has nothing of the wide variety and enormous wealth of English literature (*italics mine*).

Sukumar Sen raises a number of interesting questions to ponder upon. First, he says that all histories before his were ‘either incomplete or subjective’. But, in reality all works of history are necessarily subjective. What, then, is his understanding of a complete and objective’ history? Second, if all earlier histories were flawed because of ‘imperfect understanding of the history of the land’, how is he going to overcome this flaw and achieve ‘perfection’? Third, after all, all periodizations of/in history are essentially ‘imaginary’ only to chronologize and impose meaning to the (grand) narrative. If periodization on religious ground is ‘imaginary’, doesn’t it follow from the same logic that Sen’s periodization of Bangla literature into the Ancient-Middle-Modern also falls into an equally ‘imaginary’ slot? Fourth, he says that ‘pre-modern Bengali literature’, although to be noted as indeed being heterogenous in itself, is so ‘repetitious’ and lacking in the ‘wealth of English literature’ that he has to keep from deploying ‘the order of English literary histories’ – the idea being he wanted to, but ‘pre-modern Bengali literature’ was too impoverished for that¹⁰. Isn’t he contradicting himself on what he said on periodization? Is he, then, indicating that all periodizations are bad unless based on ‘the order of English literary histories’? Fifth, if ‘objectivity’ – for lack of a better term – is what he is aiming for, why would he himself be adjudicative when he writes on the *Kabigan* and the *Panchali* form? “For more than half a century”, Sen writes:

...the ‘Kabi’ poetry and the new ‘Panchali’ reigned supreme in the Calcutta region and in its penumbra and almost threatened to swamp everything else in literature. *But the vulgar and stupid artificiality of ‘Kabi’ poetry with its elaborate but soulless music was doomed from its very start because of its over elaboration.* The new ‘Panchali’ survived till it was superseded towards the close of the nineteenth century... (1960, 157; *italics mine*)

The '*terminus ad quem*' of Sen's self-claimed 'essentially complete survey' (Sen, D. 1962, ix) is 1941, the year Tagore died. Yet there is no mention of the *Battala-culture*. The cultural patterns that prevailed, centering primarily around the red-light areas of North Kolkata under the patronage of the *nouveaux riche* in nineteenth-century Bengal, had been very significant ones, particularly influencing the literary, printing and painting practices of contemporary times and even beyond. This is not to say that Sen was unaware of this phenomenon; he was to write a whole separate full-length book on the topic in 1984, but was for the moment reluctant to claim its importance when it came to writing *history* of Bangla literature¹¹!

Sukumar Sen was, in fact, vested with an interest in removing from Bengali's cultural past all those 'blemishes' Dineshchandra found worth preserving. That these two maverick historians assumed contradictory opinions on the 'literary' worth of the 'pre-modern' Bangla literature, that these two schools bore diverging stances on the question of accommodating 'folk' within the category 'Bangla literature', is symbolic of the bipolar opinion that had prevailed among the nineteenth century *bhadralok* (gentry) Bengali community on the impact of colonialism and its policies. While on the one hand, Dineshchandra (1896, 34) sees pedagogic pursuits in English, a trend 'modern' Bengalees either chose to or were made to embrace after the Macaulean intervention in Indian education, as particularly 'wasteful', Sukumar Sen, on the other hand, is eloquently appreciative of "the *refinement* initiated by English education and the introduction of new values." (1977, 1)

That both Dineshchandra Sen and Sukumar Sen envisaged the 'Bengali as an imagined community', each from his respective 'habitus', to borrow Bourdieu's evocative phrase, is reflected in their respective understandings of and endeavors to historicize Bangla literature. Although their rationale for historicizing differs considerably, the colonial exposure seemed to have imbricated in both similar 'structures of feeling' towards the 'folk'. This explains why neither questioned the 'order of things' of the construct named 'folk', notwithstanding their difference in opinion in evaluating 'folk'. Assuming it to be a *naturalized* category, both, in fact, concluded

that the 'folk' element could essentially be generically distilled from the rest of its counterparts. While, for Dineshchandra, 'folk' would become synonymous with 'writing back to the empire', Sukumar Sen would still question its commensurability with 'modern' Bengali literature. However, what they seem to unanimously agree on is the immanent dichotomy between the domain of the 'folk' and that of (Bangla) literature.

NOTES:

1. I am indebted to Debaprasad Bandyopadhyay and Tejaswini Niranjana for their insightful suggestions on this topic. Preliminary drafts of this paper have been read at Centre for The Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore, India in March 2010 and at the University of Montreal, Canada in March 2011. I am thankful to the audience who gave feedback. I have put forth similar arguments in a Bangla paper already published (See: Ray, 2013). To note additionally, 'Bangla' and 'Bengali' at times appear overlapping in the paper: the *Bengali* people have been called Bengali all through, but as of the language, while I myself preferred to call it *Bangla* I have retained *Bengali* wherever it appeared in the secondary sources. All translations cited here from Bangla sources are mine unless otherwise indicated.
2. Derrida (2002), however, presents a critique of Rousseau for having imbibed from Levi Strauss (1969) the legacy of a dialectical either/or rapport between nature and culture instead of a more symbiotic one.
3. Ong (1982), for example, shows how the 'secondary orality' of the print culture hegemonizes the 'primary orality' of the community authorship prevalent in pre-printing cultures.
4. This argument of mine draws on provocative clues from feminist scholarship that argues that the home and women had also been similar sites. For details, see Sarkar, T. (2001) and Sangari, K. & Vaid, S. (ed.) (1989).
5. Panikkar (1995) cites Tarachand's *History of Freedom Movement in India*, I, p. 192; no other details on bibliography cited.

6. In Bangla literature, Bharatchandra Ray, author of the trilogy *Annapurnamangala* set new paradigms in the *horizon of expectation* in terms of literary taste and came to be considered as the most outstanding poet before Tagore. (Sen, Sukumar 1962, 166-62) *Vidyasundara*, part of the same trilogy, continued to be influential among literary circles in Calcutta almost till the end of the nineteenth century. (ibid., 153) An important feature of the Bangla poetry during this period was the popular style of composition and an effort to portray gods in the image of common men. In Rameswar Bhattacharya's *Siva-Sankirtana* (1710), Siva is a petty and poor farmer and the female protagonist, Gauri, is the farmer's wife who is content with two square meals and a few yards of cloth. (ibid., 151) the sad plight of forced labor and the protest of the riots against the appointment of the dewan were some of the themes in ballads written in folk style during this theme. (ibid., 158-59)
7. For a more detailed discussion on this, see Huhn (2009).
8. Partha Chatterjee (1997, 8) writes: "...What thrives as mainstream public theatre in West Bengal or Bangladesh today is modern urban theatre, national and *clearly distinguishable* from "folk theatre" '[This] is symptomatic of the fact that these voices are almost always without an exception elitist in nature. Chatterjee is by no means *entirely* incorrect, but far more interesting to me is his legacy of inheritance and his premise of historicizing based upon which he is able to *clearly distinguish* between what he calls 'folk theatre' and 'modern urban theatre'. In reality, however, as demonstrated by Bandyopadhyay, D. (2005) and Mukhopadhyay (2001), there is always a symbiotic, two way relation between the two categories, if at all they exist in the first place.
9. Although this model, wherein the Middle stands for darkness and light as a metaphor of the Modern, is actually incommensurable with Indian modernity, it is grossly imitated in Indian historiography too, not just in literary history. Being acutely critical about the Indian Sanskritic-Vedic past, Bandyopadhyay (1999) argues that the revivalist propaganda/claim was not only baseless but also an elitist-nationalist Hindu ploy to de-historicize and dismiss the glory of the

(Medieval) Muslim era and marginalize the Muslims in the arena of nationalist politics, while at the same time projecting the Hindus as more competent future administrators in the eyes of the British.

10. However, he was to do precisely – the same: superimpose 'the order of English literary histories' and tailor-fit Bangla literature into the Ancient-Middle-Modern pigeon-holes.
11. In fact, Sen was not as dismissive of the rural 'ballads' tradition as he was of the *Battala* and *Kabigan* culture, which were essentially urban forms. That Sen deemed the 'rustic' expressions incompatible with urbanity is symbolic of how he re-appropriates the urban-rural binary. I am indebted to the (anonymous) referee for bringing this up.

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Shatarupa Sinha

EVALUATING INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE: EXPLORING GROUNDS IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

The scope of comparative literary studies in India is expanding at an exponential rate, and now as comparatists we have arrived at an exciting point where we can start exploring new grounds, and map our own distinct trajectories keeping in focus literatures constructed in our own *bhashas*. In this context, the reading of Indian English Literature, its methodological complexity and pedagogical implications can be an interesting take-off point for comparative literary studies in India.

Buddhadeva Bose's observation on 'Indo-Anglian poetry' as "a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere" (qtd. in Mehrotra 15) is an oft-quoted and frequently commented upon phrase. Many scholars have expressed strong views on Bose's remark, but unfortunately the most genuine concern behind this remark has been entirely missed. Bose's primary concern as a comparatist was that of Indian English Literature, which was then referred as 'Indo-Anglian' literature, exercising its monopoly over Indian *bhasha* literatures. The fear that Indian English Literature would dethrone other Indian literatures from literary, critical and academic discourses was not an altogether imagined fear. Indian English Literature has entered into the Indian literary-cultural space. Most of the English departments in Indian universities, by way of accommodating comparative literary studies, have included this body of writing as part of their curriculum, fuelling the concerns of Indian comparatists who have been arguing for a more inclusive approach by attributing due recognition to Indian *bhasha* literatures. Indian English Literature

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has most certainly established itself as an independent course of study, but it is certainly not a literature that exists 'in lieu of' Indian *bhasha* literatures. It is true that the spurt in its creative output has in recent times surpassed the literary production in several Indian languages. While on the one hand it has generated admiration around Indian English Literature with a plethora of prizes awarded to litterateurs, on the other, this might turn out to be a matter of serious concern for all *bhasha* literature enthusiasts.

Paradoxically though, this phenomenon can be turned favourably towards comparative literary studies in India. The motive of Comparative Literature in the Indian context is not a mere comparison between texts and authors; neither does it lie in applying theoretical tools to study literature, nor in employing a cultural studies approach. Comparative Literature in India stands for something beyond that. It is very different from the western approach towards this discipline which evaluates comparative methodology in the light of a different worldview from the present Indian context, and is certainly culture-specific. Indian English Literature presents an ideal situation for the comparatist to explore possible grounds in comparative methodological tools to decipher the text in its cultural and historical milieu. In this context, it is worth referring to "Can the Non-Western Comparatist Speak?" where Ipshita Chanda makes an emphatic point:

The text necessitates theory rather than the other way round. And so, the task of the comparatist is to locate both text and reader in the interstices of literary and extra-literary systems that form the context of its production. The strength of the unglamorous conglomerate of comparative methodological tools, namely thematology, historiography, genology and the relations of contact, is that they enable us to discern the repertoires of questions posed and answered by texts produced and received in particular historical conjunctures (Chanda 2003, 63).

The reception of Indian English literary texts has been fraught with many challenges. The problems of reading this body of literature

cannot be addressed by way of imposing a theory to understand it, or by contesting its existence as literature. The pedagogical implications of Indian English literary texts can be resolved by trying to locate the texts and their readers 'in the interstices of literary and extra-literary systems that form the context of its production', and also analysing it in relation to the contact between English and other Indian languages.

English in/and India

The history of English in India is rather complex. It is more a story of complicity on the part of both the coloniser and the colonised. In order to meet the desires for further colonial expansion, both in terms of maintaining a strong geo-political control as also an intellectual control, English education was formally introduced in India. Since the policy of providing any kind of formal education was not on the agenda of the East India Company, it is pertinent to note that English had to struggle and negotiate a great deal to be able to formally enter into the space of the Indian education system and become a part of the Indian linguistic repertoire. One is aware of the long and continuous ideological debates between the Orientalists and the Anglicists on the nature, content and the medium of education in India, which was finally resolved by adopting the western system of education, and with the introduction of English in India.¹ Alongside these debates were a host of other factors, including several attempts by Indian intellectuals who strongly supported the cause of English education that had significant roles to play in this curious history.

Of the independent initiatives taken, the most notable was the efforts made by Raja Rammohun Roy, who conceived the idea of an educational institution that would later come to be known as Hindoo College of Bengal. This was the occasion when, for the first time, interests were being expressed for adopting English as the medium of instruction. In his letter dated May 18, 1816, Sir Edward Hyde East writes:

An interesting and curious scene has lately been exhibited here, ... that many of the leading Hindoos were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in a liberal manner as practiced by Europeans of condition; ... The meeting was accordingly held at my house on the 14th of May, 1816, at which 50 and upwards of the most respectable Hindoo inhabitants of rank or wealth attended, including also the principal Pundits; ... Most of them, however, appeared to take great interest in the proceedings, and all expressed themselves in favour of making the acquisition of the English language a principal object of education, together with its moral and scientific productions (Basu, 2011: 40-42).

In 1793 while renewing the East India Company's Charter, suggestions were made to the Company for allocating a portion of its revenues in India for the education of the Indians. The proposal was met with strong opposition, and finally was reconsidered during the next renewal of the Company's Charter in 1813, where a sum of one lakh of rupees was recommended for improving the state of education and preservation of educational institutions in India. This is evident in a letter dated June 3, 1814, from the Court of Directors to the Governor-General-in-Council of Bengal.¹ In 1823, a Committee of Public Instruction was formed to look into matters related to the non-utilisation of this fund, and Horace Hayman Wilson a renowned Sanskrit scholar, was appointed its Secretary. Wilson fervently advocated the cause of oriental learning and strongly opposed the idea of teaching English to the Indians. Rammohun Roy in a letter dated December 11, 1823, to the then Governor-General of India, Lord Amherst, expressed the necessity to impart education based on the European model,² while the Committee of Public Instruction was in favour of Oriental learning.

With Lord William Bentinck's appointment as Governor-General of India in 1828, there was an increased pressure for Anglicisation of Indian education. Bentinck refused to fund the projects sponsored

by Fort William College for writing and publishing books in vernacular languages. As the first member of the Indian Law Commission, Thomas Babington Macaulay came to India, and helped in fulfilling Bentinck's agenda by resolving the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy that ended in 1835 with Anglicisation of education in India. On March 7, 1835, the East India Company's official language was changed from Persian to English. This was in direct response to Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" on February 2, 1835, where Macaulay acted as Bentinck's mouthpiece. Bentinck's initiative was not in favour of educating the people of India; it was rather a move to anglicise them.³

Marked by several debates and controversies over years, English was finally thrust upon the Indians through a regulated framework of academic curricula, which continues till date. During the twenty years, 1835-1855, the number of those educated in English increased rapidly. In 1857 three Indian universities were established in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and subsequently English did not remain simply a language of instruction, but British English literature became a part of the curriculum. English established itself both as languages of education and of literature.

The manner in which English was introduced in India reveals a fascinating tale of an affected Indian desire, characterised by a sense of awe and veneration for the English language. The introduction of English in India cannot be simply viewed as a cultural imposition from the top, but as a strategic negotiation of miscalculated interests. The belief that English education would make the Indians intellectually at par with the Europeans was a desire that drove the colonised, while a dependence on English education will make the Indians remain forever subservient to the Europeans drove the coloniser's desire. In actual terms, none of this materialised, but English gradually became a part of the Indian linguistic space. Therefore, there is nothing unusual in its growth as a medium of creative expression in India.

Developing as an independent category of writing and experimenting with different varieties of Indian English, Indian

English Literature in its present avatar holds a peculiar place within the ambit of Indian literature. While at times, it is both Indian and English literature, at others, it falls neither into the category of Indian nor of English literature. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that it belongs to a completely unique category in itself. Indian literary imagination has eventually developed and formulated Indian English Literature as a distinct body of literary culture. English is certainly more of a strange phenomenon in India than a mere language. It is a curious case of being both 'Indian' and 'English' at the same time. Interestingly enough, this 'Indian' too is not defined in any concrete manner. It surpasses the geopolitical space of nation to an imagined cultural space which tries to negotiate with an 'Indian way' of perceiving society. It is this unique quality of being Indian that makes 'Indianness' contentious. Several attempts have been made by scholars to define and describe what Indianness is, but it remains a very ambiguous term. The principal concern regarding the nature and scope of Indian English Literature has been largely centred on this abstract notion of Indianness that seems to be the chief determining factor in assessing how much 'Indian' is Indian English Literature. Indianness is an abstract concept enmeshed in the theoretical categories of an imagined Indian identity. It comprises of ideological configurations of a particular social milieu that are indicative of the cultural projects of a particular nation. Indianness seems to assimilate all that is characteristic of Indian culture, which again is a highly ambiguous term. For a multilingual and multicultural nation like India, such a term adds much perplexity rather than providing a synthetic solution. However, most of the writings in Indian English unconsciously aim towards achieving a homogenous identity through the idea of an all-encompassing Indianness, an identity that is disintegrated, disruptive and distraught. Defining Indianness through points of convergence and divergence is equally distraught for other *bhasha* literatures.

A large number of Indian English writings fall into the ambivalent trap of a pseudo-Indian identity that neither exists, nor can be made to exist, but forever remains an ideal, yet elusive dream

for these writers. Depicting an Indian reality is an uphill task, for there is, once again, no single reality, but several layers of realities. The writer is caught between representing the idea of a nation and the idea of an Indian reality by means of a much acclaimed pan-Indian language, which makes the writing even more complex. What emerges eventually through most of these writings is an image of contemporary India that needs to be projected to the west, although this may not be driven by vested political interests as such, but certainly driven by intellectual interests.

The imposition of English on the Indians lends it a very interesting, and at the same time, a problematic character. Dasgupta (2006, 11) makes a critique of the “pan-Indian claim” that Indian English Literature seems to exercise over other Indian *bhashas* literatures. Unlike other Indian languages, the use of English in India is not defined by any geographical location. English in India bestows a feeling of what may be described as an affective anxiety on its users. The knowledge of English defines and ascribes a specific identity to its user, the possession of which indicates a lack of identity. English regulates the dynamics of status, class and social mobility, and shapes a person’s socio-cultural identity in India today. Indian English seems to have entered the linguistic and cultural spaces of a majority of the urban Indians. Indians’ claim to English is through the process of nativization, which is “the result of the new ‘un-English’ linguistic and cultural setting in which English is used as a tool of communication” (Kachru 1983, 3). English has finally ceased to be a foreign language in India. The ease with which English has entered the literary, linguistic and cultural space of the Indians is a remarkable phenomenon. However complicated and sometimes unsavoury the history behind the introduction of English in India might be, there is no denying the fact that Indian English has indeed become a favoured mode of expression in recent times.

Indian English may hence be seen as an interesting phenomenon, whose growth and development offers an analytical understanding of this body of literary writing. A diachronic study of Indian English

would offer a critical insight into the complex literature-language interface. Since the development of Indian English Literature has a close affinity with the evolution of English as a language of literary expression in India, Indian English may be studied as a category of literary writings, as a category of language in which it is expressed, and as a category of cultural space in which it is situated, thereby employing comparative methodological tools, as mentioned by Chanda.

Indian English as a Category of Literary Writings

The history of Indian writing in English has been chronicled by various scholars and critics, but “not until the third or fourth decade of this century was there a serious and systematic attempt to place such writing in its proper historical and cultural context and to evaluate it as literature” (Mukherjee 2001, 21). With majority of the systematic projects undertaken in historiography concentrating in the post-1940s, it was perhaps around this time onwards that Indian English Literature began to be accepted with some amount of seriousness. While at the initial stages Indian English Literature developed under the British Romantic influence, it struggled to create a distinct identity of its own in post-independent India. A shift from the idea that Indians could also write in English to the fact that Indians were actually projecting contemporary Indian realities in English, had already taken place. As an increased number of writers began writing in English, Indian English Literature developed its own trajectory in terms of different genres, themes and literary history. As more and more printed material began to be made available in English, the boundary of Indian writing in English began expanding. Interestingly, this process helped to carve a distinct boundary for Indian English Literature within the large corpus of all the writing that was being produced in the English language.

Any literary history of this literature for that matter would justify this claim of how English writing in India has developed. Beginning with non-fictional accounts, letters and poetry, the writing

shifted towards novels and a host of political writings. In the post-independent era, especially since the 1960s, there was a huge upsurge in the production of printed material in English. English was gradually moving from its lingua franca status to being recognised as a language for more intimate as well as widespread usage in India. This was a major shift in establishing English as an independent language whose literary production was sooner to be accepted in literary circles. The Order made by the President of India on April 27, 1960, created provisions for English to be used as the principal official language until 1965. The Order further stated that “provision should be made in terms of clause (3) of article 343 for the continued use of English even after 1965 for purposes to be specified by Parliament by law for as long as may be necessary” (Government of India, 2011). The official status assigned to the English language automatically ascribed a definite and authentic identity to this language. Even the Sahitya Akademi, established in 1954, which honours “the most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the major Indian languages recognised by the Akademy [*sic*]” (Sahitya Akademi, n.d.), conferred the first Sahitya Akademi award for Indian English writing to R.K. Narayan’s *Guide* as early as 1960, while the first Sahitya Akademi awards in other Indian languages were given in 1955. Indian English Literature has rightly been appropriated into the body of modern Indian literature and the discourse of modernism in Indian literature.

The scope of Indian English Literature was thus defined and given an official status to establish its identity. Once this was achieved, writing in Indian English gradually became fashionable, and then almost a norm. There has been a current trend where numerous writers have started experimenting with Indian English writing, but the bulk of contemporary fiction that is produced in Indian English in recent times is often devoid of much literary merit. That is perhaps one of the major reasons why Indian English Literature is often considered with the least amount of seriousness, with a few exceptions. The growth of Indian English Literature in terms of creative output has far surpassed suitable critical scholarship

in this area. The critical reception of Indian English Literature has emerged only in recent times, though in a very insubstantial manner, thereby leading to serious crisis in literary criticism and critical literary theory. The nature of Indian English Literature has always been a debatable issue, whether in discussions pertaining to its critical tradition, or in the writing of its history. Whatever critical work on Indian English Literature has been attempted, several among them have a propensity towards historiography. Though the boundaries between literary criticism and literary history are not always well-defined, that certainly cannot count for an apathetic attitude towards serious critical enterprise. Interestingly, the unique position of Indian English has “engendered such an overwhelming question mark against the relevance of writing in English in India that it has, perhaps, monopolised much of the critical attention” (Dasgupta 2006, 10). This has left comparatively less scope for critical deliberations. Many of the histories of Indian English writing suffer from similar crisis where most of the discussions begin with ‘how Indian’ or ‘how English’ is Indian writing in English, an indeed overwhelming concern regarding Indian English Literature.

Writing in English, or for that matter in Indian English, is teleological. The writer knows the final outcome of the work – creation of an image of India that is homogenous, cosmopolitan and is an extensive display of Indianness. The process of writing in Indian English and the formation of Indian English Literature is a discursive act of negotiating with an idea of India, and the notion of Indianness. In response to the ‘pan-Indian claim’, Indian English Literature has come a long way in transgressing the regional insularities which most unfortunately dominate contemporary Indian *bhasha* literatures.

What began as initial attempts of being able to write and express in English has been replaced by a conscious act of writing in English with a definite purpose. The early challenge of proving to the colonial masters that Indians could also write effectively in English is substituted by writing in Indian English for the international market. At this point the journey of Indian English Literature

through its various nomenclatures offers an interesting insight. At every stage of its naming and un-naming, the focus of different aspects of this literary discourse came to be highlighted. Each name is indicative of the different parameters that were considered significant determining factors in defining this literature. Each name is indicative of the different categories of literary writing that were meant for inclusion (or exclusion). As the scope of this literature widened, it created a special framework for Indian English literary discourse. Indian English thus becomes an important tool in understanding the various changes that have taken place in this literature. An analysis of these changes suggests how the current tag of Indian English Literature emphasises and plays upon 'Indian English' as the central thematic concern.

A thematological study within the nationalist discourse may be an important tool for reading nineteenth century Indian English novels. A cursory glance at the nineteenth century Indian English writings reveal a nascent space where Indian and British social codes began intersecting and hence tried to mutually determine one another. Indian writers who were writing in English found a new zeal in writing novels assuming a critical stance towards what they viewed as outdated social practices. This is evident since Bankimchandra Chatterjee's 1864 novel, *Rajmohan's Wife*, which was the first English novel to be written by an Indian. By the beginning of the twentieth century, majority of the Indian English writers began emphasizing on an Indian content, especially keeping in mind the nationalist fervour and movements.

The desire of intellectual equality with the colonial masters was a quest towards assimilation and acculturation vis-à-vis English literature. Indian English today has become a mouthpiece of othering the self, locating a postcolonial identity and voicing dissent. Writing in Indian English creates a sense of elitism that is discernable in its authorship, readership and setting, restricted to few urban cosmopolitan cities of India, and a small section of Indian society. This makes the claim for pan-Indian literature to appear as restrictive and parochial. The kind of literature that is produced, its place of

origin, the background of writers, readership, publicity, production and sales are governed by a particular class of urban market forces, thereby making the dynamics of social mobility and identity operational. Creation of social hierarchy, profitable market returns, allure of innumerable prizes and awards make the act of Indian English writing a desirable choice. In this process Indian English becomes a category of a conscious act of culturally-charged literary writings.

Indian English as a Category of Language

While the introduction of English education in India contributed largely to the origin and development of this language, English matured in its course, absorbing the traits of the indigenous linguistic registers of India, often amalgamating and intermixing with other languages of India, and leading to the creation of a hybrid variety of English that was typically Indianised in its tone and tenor. A new variety of English was in the making that wove creative artistry with flavours of local imagery, cultural symbols and indigenous myths. The production of this new medium of expression, Indian English, prompted a new kind of writing, Indian English writing, which may be viewed as a work of cultural reconstruction in a language that was initially foreign and alien. The growth of this language offers an interesting study of deviations, assimilation and acculturation in the socio-linguistic space of Indian English Literature.

"By the term *Indian English Literature* (or *Writing*) is meant the fast-growing body of literature which is written by Indians using English as their *second* language" (Kachru 1983, 85). Though many Indians in contemporary urban India would claim English to be their mother tongue, the fact remains that English is not the primary language here. Through generations of English usage, this language may be the first preferred language of expression for a very limited and small section of Indians, but not at all preferred by the majority. David McCutcheon (1973) made an interesting remark about the fascination for writing in English rather than in one's own mother tongue. These observations indicate a constant creative tension

between the medium, that is English, and the content, that is based on an idea of Indianness⁴. In this context, Indian English as a category of language of creative expression offers yet another tool to study the literature-language interface. It can, however, not be said that these writers have difficulty expressing themselves in English. These writers have a background in English education, and perhaps can express themselves more fluently in English than in any other language. Yet the presence of an 'Indian' language looms large in the mental space of most of these writers. This paradoxically leads to a contention whether writing in Indian English is a process of continuous translation. In fact, the act of creation in Indian English often becomes an act of transcreation. While this trend was more visible in the pre-independence Indian English writers, the post-independence period witnessed a smoother transition from the thought of creation to the act of creation. This transition may not be that smooth, since the characters that these writers create are people who do not normally speak or think in English, thus effectively dealing with non-English speaking people in non-English speaking situations. The text becomes a site for constant cultural discourse between the non-English speaking characters in non-English speaking situations, and the medium of the text, which is English. This makes Indian English Literature vulnerable to the charge of being labelled as a translated text even before it is actually written.

A study of Indian English texts reflect how these texts operate as sites for multilingual and multicultural negotiations. The creative exigencies of Indian English are overcome by the indisputable Indian character that the language possesses. Kamala Das in her poem "An Introduction" (Gokak 1995, 272-273) conveys this sentiment in a spirited defence of Indian English. She writes as a curt response,

... Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? ... (ll. 6-15).

Way back in the 1960s Kamala Das echoed the 'queerness' of Indian English, a language that is 'half English' and 'half Indian', which is equally relevant in present times. Despite all its distortions vis-à-vis the Standard English, it becomes a personalised active language of expression⁵. The personalised note of Indian English adds complexity to its usage by Indian English writers. Accepting Indian English with all its syntactical nuances has given way to a cross-cultural shift where the writer's creative medium is exploited to its fullest potential. Indian English is in constant dialogue with other Indian languages; hence it is always in a state of growth. The organic evolution of Indian English lends it flexibility to adapt in various situations, and in this case, primarily Indian situations. It is worthwhile to make a note of the heterogeneity of Indian English with its several variants.

The Indian English lexicon consists of a large number of Indian words. There was a time when writers of this literature would provide a glossary at the end of the text to explain the meaning and usage of 'non-English' words in the text. Over the years, the reader of Indian English Literature is expected to 'know' the 'Indian' words in the text as part of the natural reading process, without any intermittence or digression while the explanation of the meaning of a word or phrase is provided. Such words are essentially a part of the narrative, and not isolated terms. Indian English is now an important component of the Indian literary and intellectual milieu, integrating linguistic elements to enhance cultural hybridity. In its initial stages, Indian English writing incorporated essential features of "Indianisms or what you like, which are purely stylistic devices, used... and those that are common features of the language of the most Indian writers in English, and work it as a distinct variety, distinct from other varieties of English in its idiom, imagery and collocational deviations" (Mohan, 1978: 192). Subsequently this

language has acquired a new identity as an accepted, independent creative language. It has become a part of the heterogeneous cultural milieu which speaks more of a cultural hybridity, rather than of staking one's own language and culture at the cost of adopting the coloniser's language and culture. The poem "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." by Nissim Ezekiel (1989) offers a rather intriguing instance of the very 'Indianisms' used in English through the process of nativization of English.

Friends,
our dear sister
is departing for foreign
in two three days,
and
we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.
...
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
even for no reason but simply because
she is feeling.
...
Whenever I asked her to do anything,
she was saying, 'Just now only
I will do it.' That is showing
good spirit. I am always
appreciating the good spirit.
...
Now I ask other speakers to speak
and afterwards Miss Pushpa
will do summing up.

Initially the poem may arouse laughter, but it promptly demonstrates how English is articulated in India. A significant question arises here regarding its acceptability. But acceptability by whose standards? Who decides what acceptable 'English' is in the Indian context? For the average Indian reader, comprehending these lines is not very difficult because this is how English is actually spoken in many parts of the country, and this is as much a part of Indian English

as any other piece of Indian English literary writing. Since English in India is primarily not the mother tongue of the speaker, the L₂ learner of English finds the order and arrangement of words very similar to many Indian languages. For the average Indian who is usually the L₂ learner of English, the individual meaning of the words are known, and there is familiarity with word-order, thereby making it easier and simpler to grasp the intended meaning of these lines. If the situation and context are familiar, the chances of misinterpreting the meanings of unknown words will decrease, and the ability to guess the correct meanings of words will increase. Hence, a process of constant translation takes place in the L₂ learner's mind.

The growth of this language reveals an interesting diachronic movement of socio-cultural assimilation and acculturation. The exoticism around Indian English has vanished. Indian English writers are engaged in the process of inventing new styles of communication, drawing often from their personal socio-linguistic milieu, their multilingual literary upbringing, and in due course creating lexical variations. A study of the transformations in Indian English enables one to understand the basis of continuous linguistic and cultural negotiations that are ultimately responsible for the steady evolution of this hybrid language. If one accepts Indian English as an independent language, the best possible way to understand this language is through the literature written in Indian English, which now arguably forms an integral part of Indian literature.

It is important to note how Indian English texts use the language keeping in mind different social registers. However, the educational institutions and publishing houses in India still consider and follow Standard English as their model, and many Indian English words remain unacceptable in the academic discourse. What is Standard English in the Indian context, though, remains debatable. Often there is a tendency to follow the British English as the standard form in India. What becomes problematic is that English in India is actually very different from other regions in the world where English

is the mother tongue of the users of the language. Even if there are instances of increased usage of English over generations, and there may be cases where users are not fluent in their mother tongue, yet the way in which English is used and pronounced in India by Indians is certainly very different from British English or American English or Australian English, if one may use these terms with a sense of broad generality. It is only within the discourse of Indian English Literature that Indian English is actually used in the written/printed form.

Indian English as a Category of Cultural Space

The primary focus of Indian English is one of shaping an Indian identity, while continually trying to establish its own identity. This identity formation takes place in the cultural space of Indian society. Though the cultural space is one of plurality, the pan-Indian claim of Indian English Literature pushes for a pan-Indian identity, which is eternally elusive. There is no way of overlooking the melange of cultural idiosyncrasies in the journey of Indian English, and subsequently in that of its literature. India has historically experienced cultural encounters, but the magnitude of this particular encounter with British colonialism has been immense in terms of the expansion of linguistic, literary and cultural boundaries. The modern Indian sensibility, if such can be said, is the direct outcome of this historical cultural encounter. English education has indeed played a very significant role in the creation of India's cultural space. Indian English has become one of the contemporary cultural markers of urban cosmopolitan India.

Indian English texts lie at a unique location within the Indian cultural matrix. The exceptional combination of Indian and English is in fact the attempted coexistence of culture and language together within the larger periphery of literature. The linguistic category of English cuts through the cultural category of Indian, and strives to attain a rare blend in Indian English. The subject matter of most of the creative works in Indian English Literature is a depiction of an Indian way of life. The subject matter makes it a part of

Indian literature. However, this has always remained a serious matter of contention. Interestingly, it has often been witnessed that most of the Indian English work of fiction is written for a western audience. That justifies the long detailed explanation of numerous everyday experiences which seem mundane and superfluous to the Indian reader. Indian English texts often try to present the Indian setting and situation to the western readers, while trying to nullify the cultural space of the English educated Indian readers, and negotiate with a culturally different readership. Conversely, it is also true that familiarity with the text implies familiarity with an Indian setting. Therefore, the Indian reader is not exactly outside the corpus of Indian English readers.

Indian English Literature may be viewed as the superimposition of one cultural text over another, since language too, is a culturally charged term. The challenge faced by Indian English writers is to express the niceties of one's culture in a language which is the repository of an entirely different worldview⁶. In this sense, Indian English Literature becomes an active site of interaction between two cultures and two worldviews. The fact that this literature dabbles with two cultural discourses points to the absolute necessity of a suitable critical framework to discuss its merit. Critical discussions on the nature, content and structure of Indian English Literature, however, suffers from want of sound theoretical discussions, since the tools that are employed to study this body of literature is not specified by critical theory. Moreover, there is always the danger of a specifically Indian or western reading. There is no doubt that the peculiar position of English has helped it acquire a special place in India, and one cannot deny that subsequently Indian English Literature has become very much a part of Indian literature over the years. Therefore, a critical approach that takes into consideration elements of Indian critical practice is desirable.

The consequences of this shift towards being part of Indian literature has generated a sense of confidence among the writers of Indian English vis-à-vis a much-needed theoretical rigour in asserting an Indian voice in the discourse of reading these texts.

The critical reception of Indian English Literature has emerged only in recent times, though in a very insubstantial manner. The idea is to challenge “the unconscious colonial desires of the west” which perpetuate a situation where “no Indian critic of English literature or even of Indian literature is taken seriously in Western literary circles” (Devy, 1998: 168-169).⁷ This may be ascribed to one of the major reasons for lack of sufficient critical discussions on Indian English texts. The lack of critical reading of Indian English Literature makes it more prone to be susceptible to negative criticism, which has taken place in the Indian literary scene. The over-popularity of Indian English literary texts in the international market coupled with a sense of disapproval in the Indian literary circuit has forced Indian English to locate a cultural space for itself and do the balancing act.

Ramanujan (1999) evades giving a clear answer whether there exists an Indian way of thinking. There are several indications pointing toward an Indian way of thinking that is independent of any western bearings. This independence is very peculiar in the sense that it is both intra-dependent and inter-dependent at the same time. Since Indian culture is by no means a singular cultural system and neither is it a well-defined system by any means (though there are numerous scholarly material available on Indian culture), the Indian way of thinking is a conglomeration of several cultural strains, making it intra-dependent (within each cultural practice which in turn has its own worldview) and inter-dependent (whereby each cultural value system is dependent on the other). Each specific culture is contextualised in a particular worldview. Ramanujan distinguishes between the Indian and western ways of thinking on the basis of cultural tendencies of each. He makes two interesting categories of cultural idealisation based on context-free and context-sensitive societal rules. Context-free kind of rules tend to universalise, while context-sensitive kind of rules tend to particularise. “In cultures like India’s, the context-sensitive kind of rule is the preferred formulation” (Ramanujan, 1999: 41).

Ramanujan exemplifies by giving instances from various Indian literary texts. The context-sensitive designs within a text are manifested through various literary devices used in accordance with particular cultural practices and modes. This lends coherence to the literary text, and determines how an Indian text needs to be read and understood within a particular context, keeping in mind the distinct socio-cultural factors. At this juncture it is interesting to note how Ramanujan ironically universalises the context-sensitive modes in Indian literary texts into various forms of arts and practices, where emphasis on coherence is of utmost significance, rather than unity. Ramanujan, however, observes a movement from context-sensitive to context-free society in modern times in India.

The Indian way of thinking has never remained constant, and is neither a monolithic vision. It strives to strike a balance, wherever possible, with contemporary issues. It grapples with several issues in its own unique manner, keeping in mind its plurality of discourse. In a similar vein, Indian literary criticism, which is a direct manifestation of the Indian worldview, upholding ideas of Indianness, and rooted in a context-sensitive way of thinking, needs to create its own discursive space within the Indian literary domain, and fit into a discourse of plurality, of which Indian English is now an integral part.

Locating Indian, Shaping English

Having said that Indian English is an important tool to understand the various nuances of Indian English Literature, and how Indian English operates through various linguistic, literary and cultural categories, the most pertinent academic question one arrives at is the question of Indianness. Since Indian English has surfaced in the most culturally complex situations, is the term Indianness still valid? Because a term like Indianness exists, does it qualify as a pedagogical tool and a critical apparatus to understand and explain this literature? Is the purpose that Indianness serves only to locate? an Indian identity?

Literary texts represent socio-cultural formations with reference to history, politics, place, language, and other denominators of life and living. Written over long spans of historical periods, these texts cultivate human sensibility and they may appropriately be read as a body of intimate critical discourse on man in his various social and cultural contexts. These literary texts, in turn, become active tools and agencies for understanding the relationship between various tectonic forces that operate within a society, and assist in postulating cultural configurations. All literary texts are cumulatively taken as man's quest for identity; yet each text differs from the other in the way it articulates human aspirations, and in the style it projects those aspirations. Infusing Indian English texts with elements from Indian culture is an attempt in informing the unfamiliar reader about certain cultural practices, with the object of asserting a difference, and at times connecting the subject with some recognisable western phenomenon. Therein lies a practice of inserting "Indian culture into a global family of human values (and thereby implicitly representing Indian fiction as another branch of that infamously capitalized phrase World Literature)" (Almond 2005, 148). It may be acceptable to a certain extent that Indian English writing infuses elements of Indian culture into these global human values, but a continuing cultural tradition is always accompanied by ideological considerations.

The tension between native culture and the other culture is always there, but there is alongside the trap of Indian English writing becoming a provincial imitation of the established western canon. The pedagogical solution made in order to avoid this trap is an over-emphasis on Indianness, and a tendency to read these texts as sociological or anthropological debates. The inevitable lack of suitable critical or cultural theory reduces much of the creativity of Indian English writers to a postcolonial discourse formation, which cannot be ruled out altogether, yet cannot be identified as the exclusive concern of this literature. The problem of labelling this as a postcolonial discourse formation is the result of hegemonic tendencies to idealise a homogenous worldview. Unfortunately our

cultural conditioning is such that our unprepared responses to Indian English texts may be unconsciously stereotypical and appropriative. The constant tussle between locating Indianness and identifying the themes creates pedagogical problems of dealing with Indian English Literature. The 'Indian' in this literature provides a lexicon of a wide experience to understand several ideas of India.

We need to conceive of literary texts in broader terms to include cultural productions from different templates of time and space. Texts can be non-canonical and representative at the same time. An author considered minor may reveal much more about a culture than its supposedly 'major' authors. The substance and worth of comparative approach will depend on the manner of treatment and the range and depth of concerns we bring to our reading. When comparative literature functions as a mode of apprehending the transactions between the literary, the cultural and the political in all its multivalent ways it would bring about a paradigm shift in its practice. (Ramakrishnan: 2012)

Indian English writing suffers from complexities right from its inception, its medium of expression, and finally its reception. The journey of Indian English is a journey of the complexities involved in the process of the evolution of Indian English Literature. One of the possible solutions to this complex journey is identifying an alternative discourse of reading this literature, which perhaps may be non-western, yet a balance ought to be struck between Indian and western critical practices.

NOTES:

1. This letter referred to the 43rd Clause in the Act of the 53rd of the King by which the Governor-General-in-Council was empowered to direct "a sum of not less than one lac of rupees out of any surplus revenues that may remain... to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the

learned natives of India.” It also called for “the promotion of a knowledge of the sciences amongst the inhabitants” of India. (qtd. in Basu 2011, 8)

2. In the penultimate paragraph of the letter, Rammohun Roy writes: “But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction; embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments and other apparatus” (qtd. in Ramanan 2010, 63). For the full text of the letter, one may refer to Ramanan, Mohan (ed.) *Nineteenth Century Indian English Prose: A Selection*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2004, rpt 2010. 60-64.
3. Several histories of English education in India have discussed the introduction and growth of English language in India, and its implication on the Indian education system. Though the central argument of the discussion here is not regarding English education in India, one may access B.D. Basu’s *History of Education in India under the Rule of the East India Company* (2011, first publd. 1922), Gauri Viswanathan’s “The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India” in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (1995), Ramachandra Guha’s *Patriots and Partisans* (2012) that offer some interesting and scholarly insights into this history of English education in India.
4. David McCutcheon’s *Indian Writing in English* is a significant volume for reading the history of the debate whether Indians can creatively write in English. McCutcheon discusses in detail the Abu Sayeed Ayyub-P Lal-Jyotirmoy Datta debate that started in the 1960s, and analyses the stance of each.
5. Numerous debates have ensued around the recognition of Indian English as a language having an independent identity. While linguists like B.B. Kachru who followed the naturalist discourse on language theory have identified Indian

English as L2 (second language), critics like P. Lal have vociferously argued for a standardized form of English language usage in Indo-Anglian literature. The conspicuous gaps between language theorists and literary critics on the existence and acceptability of Indian English as a separate category, is fascinatingly discussed by Probal Dasgupta in *The Otherness of English: India’s Auntie Tongue Syndrome* (1993).

6. The etymology of worldview goes back to Kant’s use of the German word *Weltanschauung* as a key-concept in the notions of German Idealism and Romanticism, denoting a global outlook on life and the world. The word *Weltanschauung* was akin to philosophy but without its rational pretensions. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had made its way into virtually every speech community in the Western world. The English equivalent has become more popular as worldview. The relationship between the new idea of worldview and the ancient one of philosophy has remained an area of debate. Philosophy usually retains its ancient association with rational and scientific thought, with its claims to universal validity; whereas worldview has connotations of a more personal and historically relative point of view, which helps shape cultural patterns. For a detailed discussion on the relationship between philosophy and world view, see Albert M. Wolters’ “On The Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy”, in Marshall, P. et al (ed.) *Stained Glass* (1983), University Press of America, 14-25.
7. Devy elaborates how one keeps deferring this process of establishing serious literary criticism in India by trying to consciously think that this is “an exercise in comparative literature”.

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Ipshita Chanda

BOOK REVIEW

Kajal Bandyopadhyay: *Tension and Synthesis in Wole Soyinka's Plays*. Dhaka: Dhaka Viswavidyalaya Prakashana Samstha, University of Dhaka, 2012. 311 pp. Taka 310.

Kajal Bandyopadhyay's *Tension and Synthesis in Wole Soyinka's Plays* is the attempt of a poet and a theatre scholar and practitioner to grasp the essence of drama as an expressive act in its social and political implications. The reader might ask why I do not say 'cultural', and cut a long story short. This is because the 'cultural' is a fraught area in the academic field of 'African Literature(s)' in the world outside Africa. This is most so in Asia, where Bandyopadhyay is one of the few scholars of what Ngugi calls Europhone African literature. Faced with questions as a poet and a citizen about the life of his time, in his country, he seeks answers from other societies and polities, located in other cultures. For instance, how does one deal with conflict in the real world where the politics of identity is then (the book was written as a thesis in the late 90's, in an Indian university) just beginning to take shape? The context of the work is clear in the prefatory words to the book, but thereafter, it disappears, perhaps remaining as an intended symbol in the two poles between which the book frames its material : tension and synthesis. So his own cultural location as a Bengali speaker, inheritor of the literature written in Bangla, is evident enough in the work. The subject of the work is Soyinka's theatre : and I do not limit it to 'drama', though this being a literature thesis, drama as a literary and verbal form which forms the core of theatre, is the central focus. Soyinka's themes are located in different parts

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of present Nigeria, which emerged out of a unit of colonial administrative convenience, the West African Protectorate. The culture of the texts is not singular, except that it is identified, in its variety, with one nation. Nigeria is a multiethnic, multilingual country and the plurality of these many cultures has been emphasised and contested across different and incongruent periods in the history of the formation of the present state. This complex 'cultural' situation was accessible to subcontinental scholars through the mediation of Anglo-american scholars when this book was written.¹ I am not certain that the situation has changed too much, twenty years on. So 'cultural' implications have to be sought in the reader/scholar's culture, unless the entire exercise is to be collapsed into a 'reading' of Soyinka's plays, in which case its interest for a journal of Comparative Literature (the only one in Asia for a long time) would be considerably diminished.

However, in this case, the 'cultural' commonalities seem to stem from a particular historical event, which Soyinka has put firmly in its place by describing it as a 'catalytic event merely' – colonisation itself, which makes Anglophone African literature available to the English speaking reader across the world, and in Asia. The factors of British domination (history records that the example of India was cited in British colonial administrative policy as exemplary — see Crowder etc), the consequent forced and fractious multiculturalism of the modern 'nation' Nigeria and the brutality of colonisation are recognisable situations to readers on the subcontinent. Starting from that basis, the exercise undertaken here is purely a literary one : though a broad framework of marxist theory is followed, this is not necessarily cultural or even literary theory. Rather, the driving force of the book is, as the title proclaims, tension and synthesis. In its genesis, its choice of subject and its aims the book conceives of the process of history as represented in art as being held in a dynamic relation between the two states of tension and synthesis.

Soyinka designates 'myth' as the connecting link between the fragmented present and the cosmic totality, which is easily evoked

in the dailyness of the societies in which his plays are located. This for Soyinka is an organising principle for the presentation of his plays – the form comes from the mythic narrative, performed in oral cultures. In the oral culture of the Yoruba, the cultural nationality to which Soyinka belongs, a pioneer like D.O.Fagumwa wrote down the myths in Roman script, structuring the written narrative within a 'frame story'. This book, one of the first to be written in Yoruba, a language without a script was translated by Soyinka into English, and named "Forest of a Thousand Daemons".² Myth as form, myth as story are foundational in the written culture that exists together with the oral in contemporary subcontinental and Nigerian societies. The orally performed appears as an organising principle in written literature : and as a writer, Bandyopadhyay seems to include this aspect into the arena of academic engagement. The result is not a scholarly thesis, but the writer's attempt to understand literature as expressive mode located in a given place and time. Thus the book analyses Soyinka's dramatisation of historical situations, reading elements of radical marxist sociology in the perspectives dramatically offered by the author. The Jero plays, *Madmen and Specialists* and *The Road* are handled thus by Bandyopadhyay. This broader frame allows the scholarly reader to share common grounds for interpretation, despite the particularity of the location of the various plays.

Bandyopadhyay speaks consistently of synthesis, but one would wonder if this resonates with Soyinka's own position vis a vis the 'old' and 'new' identified with 'local'/'western', peripheral/metropolitan, colonised/coloniser, black/white, traditional/modern sets that have from time to time dominated academic discourse about literature written in different languages across the world. If Bandyopadhyay approaches the arena of European critical theory, it is through the offices of African explicators of Soyinka : and this appears to be an oblique way of skirting those debates that the texts of 'African' writers (albeit writing in European languages, whom Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls Europhone writers) and inevitably raise in the 'postcolonial' discourse. The "lived culture

of a society", in this case, is the culture of the other – it is not the writer's and neither is it of this reviewer and many of the readers of the review. This "lived culture" can only be understood subjectively by us. It is perhaps because of the fraught nature of this enterprise that Bandyopadhyay leaves it aside . The usual 'debates' in Anglophone African literature, regarding language, canon and the relation to it, the representation of the 'native other' are fitted into the larger frame of his reading of Soyinka's plays. That larger frame is built upon the mutual dynamics of tension and synthesis, the stuff of 'history'. The writer's aim, in this book, is to map the structure of the plays as lived situations woven into a pattern through the relation between tension and synthesis. This relation may be crafted, Bandyopadhyay claims, as the logic of a historical and affective performance, the 'play'. He garners support from critics and the author himself to establish his perspective.

The form of the book recalls the placards that we see in Brechtian theatre sometimes : subtitles dealing with various aspects of the play under discussion abound, and lend a declamatory tone to the text, perhaps fitting since the genre under consideration is drama. These varied strands of thought are woven along the themes of tension and synthesis, and the method of building up remarked upon above perhaps also lends a tension to the text itself, which is not always resolved. The categorisation of characters and the thresholds of plausibility constructed for their actions, follow the categorisation available in marxist social theory : labour, elite, proletariat, bourgeois are words that Bandyopadhyay uses with a degree of theoretical precision but expressed in language that is not academic in any sense. It is rather, following the writer whom he is studying, "a dialectic of phenomena and perception", which Bandyopadhyay quotes approvingly, adding that Soyinka also says "...culture is not parts. It is not even a sum of parts, but a summation, a synthesis". These parts cohere in the literary object through the process of literarisation, and appeal to the affective capacity of the reader.

Expressions of feeling, like “creative stresses” words like “tensions”, the various “pressures”, that Soyinka uses to describe the quickening of being in the leaves of literature, are evoked as signs to thread the textual readings together. The commodification of religion and gender relations, the reification of power that capital makes obvious especially when it intervenes violently in the precolonial economy and the very nature of power itself, come in for detailed consideration in the work, following Soyinka’s concentration on these themes. But theoretically, he stops short of the move to approach difference as being, the very basis of critical theory that Adorno inaugurates with a conceptualisation of the dialectic, questioning the accepted notion of ‘synthesis’ itself. Hence the appropriation of the other through the modes of thought, which seems the objective of academic engagements with difference, is eschewed in the form of the text and finds no place in the theoretical framework either. Rather, the effort of the writer to creatively engage with the encounter of the other in thought and appearance is understood in terms of the concepts of synthesis and tension as ‘enacted’ in human lives upon the stage of history. So, Soyinka’s work is studied as dramatic realisation on stage rather than a discursive structure built on the basis of a theoretical scheme applied to literature.

The use of myth as a coherent frame, and ritual as the formal core of dramatic structure, form the poetics which help Bandyopadhyay to read the plays as specific instances of the practice of theatre in Nigeria and in the centre of the English speaking world, where the institutions of theatre have engaged with Soyinka’s work. The writer’s eloquent rejection of the practices of the latter are indications of the difference of being, realised through performance that his plays, though written in an accessible language, i.e., English, would present for the English-speaking audience of the metropolis. Bandyopadhyay has a construction of this difference, and there are common grounds for understanding in the similarity of access through language, literary system, cultural policy and economy introduced by the coloniser. Beyond this is the unique

singularity of the literary act. Though we may take issue with technical points and theoretical proclivities, as an artist, Bandyopadhyay has entered through Soyinka’s plays, a plural world which he and the writer, and this reviewer, inhabit, in societies endowed with plural cultures and plural languages. It is for this reason that his work solicits interest.

NOTES:

1. Most of these latter have been generous to both African author and Indian scholar, whatever be their personal belief and intellectual pursuit. Bernth Lindfors, to whom this book is dedicated, is one of this community.
2. D. O. Fagunwa, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, trans Wole Soyinka. Soyinka has explained in the Preface to this book, why he chose to use daemons rather than demons in the title.

Sucheta Bhattacharya

BOOK REVIEW

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*

Translated by Ben Conisbee Baer.

New York : Columbia University Press. 2011. 373 pp.

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971) was one of those first and rare breeds of 'bhadralok' Bengali authors who had ventured to take on the difficult task of narrating the complicated history of the marginalized ethnic communities of the arid red-soil *Rarh* area (western part of Bengal close to the Bengal-Bihar border) and chronicling their lives. Bandyopadhyay's vision of life in his novels is epical in its essence. His is not the way to analyse life through the exploration of individual psychology. He refuses to comment on the lives he is portraying, seeming to wear the mantle of an objective and detached chronicler instead. Yet his political thought and inclination come out loud and clear when he describes the groups or types of individuals that he would have been familiar with, as the character of Shibnath the nationalist zamindar in *Dhatridevata*, or Debu Ghosh, the school-teacher-turned-social-activist in *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram*. However, his strength as a novelist lies in his ability to capture the multifaceted nature of human life rather than in exploring the narrower labyrinths of the human mind. He seems to prefer to look upon life in its totality rather than partially from the dark incoherent interiority of human psychology. Yet the world that is foregrounded in his writing is the one which we are often unaware of, conditioned as we are by our class-determined existence forcing us to turn a blind eye to the presence of a dark community long silenced because they speak different languages from ours in more senses than one. The relationship between the marginalized community, as well as the communities

which are being rendered marginalized (like the weakening zamindars, the relicts of Lord Cornwallis's 'permanent settlement' policy defeated by the rise of a mercantile class) and the bigger social and political structure which he finds changing fast in the latter part of the colonial times in India, particularly in Bengal, is the subject of almost all his major novels. The real protagonist in Bandyopadhyay's novels is time. A majority of his characters are often passive entities through whom time plays out its games; in their narrative function they are to a certain extent similar to Hardy's rustics, silhouetting out the main protagonists. Time for Tarashankar is linear and evolving, as Hasan Azizul Haq argues in his essay "Tarashankar: Jibaner Garha Samachar". (89)¹

Hansuli Banker Upakatha (1946-51), translated by Ben Conisbee Baer as *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* (Columbia University Press, N Y, 2011) has at its core the life of a marginalized community known as the Kahars. This community, as Tarashankar shows, is a hugely hybrid and socially mobile one, a living example of the changing social identities impacted by a deep interplay between the traditional caste system and colonial interests, whereby social mobility for them is never upward but latitudinal. The Kahars are depicted not only as marginalized by the caste system but also criminalized and exploited for furthering the interests of the colony and then treated as pariah by the dominant system for their in-limbo social status and freer sexual practices. Among the Kahars themselves as a community there are deeper stratifications in professional identities, which makes the whole segment that they belong to multilayered and a maze incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Yet what turns the 'tale' (upakatha) into a novel (upanyas) is the introduction of certain universal motifs like the conflict between the new order and the old, an eternal one in every sphere of life as we know it, despite the differences in our socio-cultural identities, and the use of the narrative voice, often impersonal, shifting from detached observations on the geographical location against which the novel is set, to a slightly involved one describing the details of Kahar life. This engagement between an impersonal sweeping epic voice and the description of the intimate details of Kahar life is what transforms *Hansuli Banker Upokatha* from a tale into a novel as Lukacs would have argued. It is a world where human agency is trying to establish

itself, through the figure of young Karali, after being at the receiving end of the interests of the bigger system for centuries. However the epical vision of human destiny that Tarashankar dispenses, renders Karali's attempts quite futile too. The two main protagonists Bonwari and Karali represent two generations in conflict. Bonwari accepting and living by the standards society has bidden him to and often even colluding with it to maintain status quo. Karali the young harbinger of change resists this slotted-into identities. Between these two lies a multitude of characters belonging to both Kahars and the dominant community, living life with gusto with their individual tragedies, loves, and happinesses. Above all dominates the shadowy figure of 'Baba Thakur', the mysterious presence that controls the actions and behaviours of the Kahars and which has to be kept pacified through blood sacrifices if norms are violated. It is interesting to note that the whole community expiates for the false step taken by a single individual. It seems to be a control mechanism built by the Kahars themselves to maintain their own system, though the description of 'Baba Thakur' itself sounds uncannily like a Brahminical priestly figure, complete with fair complexion and the sacred thread round his neck. The monstrous python that Karali slaughters right at the beginning of the novel is his emissary and Karali's murder of it is very Freudian in its significance. As most of Tarashankar's novels, *Hansuli Banker Upokatha* also ends with the promise of a new beginning after the destruction of the old order.

Thanks are due to Conisbee Baer for choosing to translate this text. It entailed a difficult task and he has been majorly successful in carrying it out. He is very clear about the identity of his target readership, which is not Bengali-reading or familiar with socio-cultural-religious practices of rural Bengal.

Reading Tarashankar in the original can be an aesthetically and intellectually challenging task even for people well versed in Bangla, for his novels speak about communities, practices and political backgrounds which have long been swallowed up by history and imaginative re-structuring can be pretty daunting. Conisbee Baer is successful as a translator because he is very aware of this difficulty and he starts negotiating it with a very informative introduction connecting the novel with the bigger historical background against which it was written as well as laying open the tactics of translation that he

has employed to ably 'dance across the abyss between two languages'. An introduction can make or mar a translation, and Baer's is a happy instance.

The other element that one is always wary about in the business of dealing with translations is the quality and nature of the languages and in their comfortableness with each other. Tarashankar's language is very crisp, formal and informal periodically with demands of a particular juncture in the action of the novel and devoid of deliberate stylization with a photograph-like quality in its rendition of the spoken language. The conjunction of two opposites: the rendering of the formal/informal authorial voice in English and the capturing of the *Rarh* idiom with the right kind of distortion is not an easy job. Conisbee Baer tries at times to capture the pace of action by dropping the finite verbs which the original does not: 'A fire burning fiercely in a great stove; overhead a structure of bamboo and palm leaf has been built as a covering. Bonwari sitting on a mound in front of the stove. Roton's son Lotbor feeding sugarcane husks into the furnace mouth to fuel the fire'...(105). The substitution of the continuous present tense by participles paradoxically invests the description with a static, pictorial quality, which in the original is marked by busy activity.

Conisbee Baer perceptively comments in his introduction that '...[a] translation, no matter how gracefully executed, is as much of a [new] problem as it is a necessity and a solution.' No truer comment perhaps has been made in this translation and if we read it in the light of this observation the apparent awkwardness of the translated title is not so awkward any longer. The 'texture' of the original title would invoke in the native reader's mind not a 'hansuli' (a sickle shaped neck piece) and not a turn but a more composite image, conjunction of a geographical space and a shape ...rising over and above the individual words, a river bend. This awkwardness perhaps is necessary because it takes into account the element of untranslatability that a successful and conscious translation would always evoke.

NOTES:

1. In *Tarashankar: Byaktitwa O Sahitya*, ed. Pradyumna Bhattacharya, Sahitya Akademi, 2001.